Modesto Anarcho

the valley's insurrectionary journal of class struggle

Every Day Is Social War

#17

What We Believe

We want a stateless and classless society. We want to live in a world of autonomous communities without any form of hierarchy. We desire a world where all people have agency and control over decision making and their lives. Where power is spread out horizontally to all, not concentrated at the top. A world in which all resources that people need to sustain themselves are owned and cared for in common and in harmony with the Earth. We want to see human labor and creativity put towards real needs and desires - not profit.

We are against all governments and capitalism. We are against all governments because they are based upon a monopoly of violence. Government is a system of domination that functions to preserve a society divided by class.

We are against capitalism, because it benefits those who own the means of existence, not those who must work to survive. This is a system of wage slavery — in which we trade our lives for wages and then buy back what we need to survive with those wages. Capitalism deforms and contorts all human relationships by turning everything into a commodity, including the Earth, living things, and our very lives. Capitalism cannot exist without government — it needs the government's violence to protect the privileged position of those who benefit from it.

We reject the reformism of the Left — we are revolutionaries. We do not desire a seat at the table of politics; we desire working class power. We believe in people self-organizing for the purpose of taking direct action. Class society can only be attacked and destroyed and we must organize ourselves to carry out this attack and to maximize our own power. We believe that class society can only be done away with through the collective mass revolutionary action of all working, poor, and oppressed people that creates an international human community through social revolution.

Modesto Anarcho is a semi-regular journal produced in Modesto, California. The project serves to create revolutionary, combative, working-class literature & propaganda, as well as to participate and engage in class and community-based struggles in our area. This publication is free to all. We also run a social center, Firehouse 51, in downtown Modesto.

We have no demands for this system; we seek only its destruction.

Fear. It is fear that keeps us from acting on our desires from pursuing freedom for ourselves and others. There is often good reason to fear. In Downtown Modesto this summer, several senior citizens were served eviction notices at the Ralston Tower after it was found out that they were allowing homeless people to take showers in their units. The landlords wanted to send a message: don't even think of helping homeless people. In Southside in late July scores of individuals, including children, were rounded up and now face deportation because they were at the 7th Street Flea Market during an FBI raid on DVD and CD bootleggers. Across the Central Valley, many families live in fear of speaking out against the police that have murdered their loved ones. They are afraid to organize in their communities against what has been done to them.

This magazine that you hold in your hands is a break with that fear; it is for people who are ready to act. The stories included within aren't just meant to inform and anger you – they are meant to inspire action, critical thought, and the coming together of people to get organized. Where else can you hear about people fighting slumlords and getting a renter's keys back? How about hundreds of angry MJC students disrupting a meeting of Central Valley mayors? Where can you read an interview with needle exchange volunteers fighting the spread of Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS in some of Modesto's poorest communities?

The way in which we assert ourselves against this society which divides us and strips us of our power is always an insurrectionary process. The 'democratic' system of city council, state legislators, and national government is not a system in which our interests are represented or our 'rights' are protected. Instead, it is a way in which the inequalities of this world are maintained.

The struggles of the coming age will be one of insurrection vs. democracy. Do we go to our enemies and ask them for reforms? Do we put faith in their system in order to stop the destruction of our Earth or the degradation of our lives? Or, do we take without asking, putting in place the conditions that we need and setting fire to everything that keeps us in chains? Do we recognize and seek to expand at all costs the power which is found in our ability to organize amongst ourselves for the sake of fighting back? Or, do we simply sit back and pretend that the system in place will 'work everything out?'

For hundreds of years the political system of the nation-state has existed to keep society divided in classes.

Democracy has allowed those on the bottom to have a hand in picking from the elites which will help manage the economy which enslaves them. Now, as another election cycle looms, we must reject this facade for the smokescreen that it is.

The current age of fee hikes, budget cuts, and the slashing of wages and services (what many have called austerity), has nothing to do with a lack of money on the part of the banks and corporations. They're sitting on record profits from the bailouts and ever decreasing overhead costs as workers' benefits are slashed and wages continue to plummet. The current age of austerity has nothing to do with trying to make ends meet, but about trying to discipline the majority of the population into accepting lives without health-care, food stamps, and social security. As the current safety-nets are ripped away the old system becomes more exposed for for what it is: an organized racket that sucks life and labor out of everything as it creates value and profit through our exploitation.

We don't have all the answers, but this magazine is part of a shift away from regular people just laying down and taking whatever those in control of this world heap upon us. It's a forum where we can start to lose the fear we are subjected to day in and day out. We can begin to discuss and plan our resistance, analyze how the current modes of change (e.g. reform, the democratic process) are obsolete, and get down to the nitty-gritty.

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Fanning the Flames

Action in the Central Valley

March 8th: Several hundred Modesto Junior College (MJC) students responded to a call for a walk-out against budget cuts that would result in the gutting of various departments, the rising of fees, and the laying off of faculty. Students rallied in the quad in front of the Morris (administration) Building for over half an hour, giving impromptu speeches on how the cuts and layoffs would affect them. Security guards attempted to stop students who were encouraging others to join the rally from using megaphones, but generally stood off to the side, photographing protesters. According to several students that were interviewed, administrators with Modesto Junior College called police and warned security that members of Modesto Anarcho would be on the campus, 'stirring up trouble.' Also speaking at the rally were several faculty members who expressed solidarity with the students.

After rallying, students marched around the campus chanting, "No Cuts, No Fees, Education Should Be Free," and "They Say Cut Backs, We Say Fight Back!" After marching around the outside of the campus, the march then snaked through Pirates Village, drawing more students into the march, and encouraging staff to come outside to voice their support for the hundreds of protesters. Protesters then marched through the student center and to the Morris Building, home to the school administration. After finding the front doors locked, they moved to the back where security quickly locked the doors for fear of students entering the building.

The crowd then moved to the Art Department, where the director of the gallery addressed the crowd. They then moved downtown, leaving the campus. At one point, someone in the march slowly drove their car into the crowd, and several people began ghostriding. A block before J Street, two police officers arrived on motorcycle and attempted to push the crowd onto the sidewalk. Students refused and held the asphalt, moving up J Street and into 10th Street Place. Unknown to the students, Mayor Jim Ridenour was also hosting a 'protest' of his own, attended by city bureaucrats, high-ranking police officers, and other local Mayors, protesting Governor Brown's budget which shifts funds away from city redevelopment funds. In Modesto, we have seen that 're-development' means more surveillance, more police sub-stations, and shutting down our parks. On the very same day, it was announced that Modesto City Schools would lay-off 32 teachers, while administrators continue to make salaries in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Looking stunned, the cops and politicians wrapped up their event as they could not be heard over the student march, and disappeared. Students expressed their outrage towards those in suits attending the mayor's event. Students began chanting, "Save the Teachers, Cut the Admins;" and several speeches were made linking the Modesto police to the MJC Security, both of whom sought to stop students and workers from resisting the crisis, as well as local politicians and those responsible for passing austerity measures at MJC. Students then headed back to the college, still chanting, with police and later campus security following close by.

The walkout was important for many reasons. Hundreds of students at MJC left class, rallying together and marching for hours. Many faculty and staff were directly supportive of the walkout, allowing students to attend the event, promoting the event in class, and even shutting down classes in support. The messages of solidarity that were

expressed at the rally in front of the Morris building also furthered the bonds between students and workers. The fearlessness that students expressed in the face of harassment by security and despite intimidation by the MJC administration the previous week, was inspiring. Neither were students afraid to hold the streets when police attempted to remove them, nor were they afraid to stand up to Vice Mayor Brad Hawn, and all the other city bureaucrats who slinked back into their rat holes when confronted with a crowd of angry students.

April 13th: In April, state-wide protests broke out over proposed cuts to higher education at many University of California (UC), state (CSU), and community colleges. In Sacramento, CSU students held a short occupation of administration buildings which resulted in students' removal by riot police. According to the Occupy California blog:

"Students and faculty at around 4 California State University campuses held sit-ins today in administration buildings. Sit-ins and marches to administrative offices took place at: CSU Fresno,Monterey, Sacramento, East Bay, Long Beach, Pomona, Northridge, San Francisco State University, and San Jose State University. Rallies, marches and teach-ins were scheduled at all 23 CSU campuses today as a part of a day of action. AP estimates more than 10,000 participated.

...[A]round 1000 students and faculty at CSU Sacramento marched from the library quad to an administrative building to deliver a set of petitions, and around 100 demonstrators staged a sit-in demanding the resignation of the CSU Chancellor. According to the CSU Sacramento Occupation blog:

The CSU system is failing, plain and simple. Chancellor Reed and the Board of Trustees continue to raise tuition (a rumored 18% increase for next Fall), cut classes, and increase class size. Tuition has been increasing unpre-

SAVE
California what
Students rally at 10th Street Place in downtown Modesto after walking out of class at MJC 08 March 2011

dictably since 2002, and by cutting classes students have to postpone graduation, and by increasing class size they are decreasing the quality of our education. We, as students, are tired of it!!

On April 13 students in the CSU system showed our administration that we are fed up with 'business as usual'. Every CSU campus had a demonstration of some kind, be it a rally, march, or sit-in. At California State University, Sacramento we had a walk out at 12:20pm and a rally at 12:30pm. We had 1,500 students show up at the rally and voice their dissatisfaction with our administration. Those 1,500 students then marched as one to our administration building, Sacramento Hall, and occup[ied] it."

Students involved in the occupation demanded that there be a freeze on managerial raises and began talks with the President of the CSU. After a few days, those in power called out their trusty friends the police, and the occupiers were facing down an army of riot police. Students were threatened with arrest and soon led out of the building. Four students are facing charges related to their involvement with the occupation. Modesto Anarcho stands in solidarity with those students arrested and commend those brave enough to occupy their campus, however we hope that the students have learned that those in power, (like the CSUS President) cannot and will never be 'on their side.' The job of administrators is to implement austerity measures, not fight them. Our class interests conflict by nature, and in the end, those in power control the police, and direct them against us. As the struggle against austerity boils over into a battle against capitalism itself, it is our hope that students everywhere can use these skills of occupation in the struggles to come.

June 14th: After Oscar Grant's killer, Johannes Mehserle, walked free having served only a year in jail, rebels in Fresno moved against the police, again targeting a police officer's memorial site. The communiqué left on IndyBay.org read:

"Johannes Mehserle walked free after serving less than a year in jail after he murdered Oscar Grant in cold blood. Mehserle is free, Oscar Grants daughters still have no father, his parents have no son, he is still dead and his executioner walks free. This is bullshit and in response the pig memorial in front of FPD HQ had paint thrown on it with the message "Oscar Grant was here, Rest In Power Brother". These pigs can't keep getting away with killing our people.

Angelo Fernandez was recently shot in the back by FPD, he was unarmed. This problem of killer pigs is not only in Oakland but also in Fresno and pretty much every city. We will not sit idly by while this happens. The time to fight back is now, choose targets, cover your tracks, plan your actions out and strike. No Justice, No Peace, Fuck the Police!"

June 15th: Organizing along the lines of the Seattle Solidarity Network (SeaSol), the Modesto Solidarity Network, defining itself as "a network of working people and tenants who work to defend ourselves through direct action and mutual support," launched its first campaign. Solidarity networks use group action to pressure landlords and bosses to return stolen wages and deposits, make essential repairs, stop illegal evictions, facilitate legal access to homes, and rehire workers who are fired for unjust reasons.

Modesto Solidarity Network's first campaign, according to its website, was against EXIT Reality, a company with offices around Modesto and Northern California. The fight was centered around the illegal lockout of a renter from their apartment. In California, an illegal lockout refers to the practice of landlords changing locks and harassing or threatening tenants until they leave their homes even though they have not been given the legally-required 30-days' notice. This practice is wide-spread among Modesto landlords,to whom this action should be a warning. Modesto Solidarity began the campaign with a demand delivery, or the delivery of a letter in which the demands are stated clearly and the boss or landlord is given a time-frame in which they must respond or the group begins taking action against them. As their blog wrote:

"*The demand delivery went really well. 20 of us accompanied Michele to deliver her demands to John Hertle at Exit Realty. John was commuting back from the Bay Area, and the letter was read over the phone by the receptionist. He was given 24 hours to respond, and we are preparing for action tomorrow.*

After no word for 24 hours, the group then moved to picket EXIT Realty. Again, according to the Modesto Solidarity blog:

Today, Thursday, June 16th 2011, members of Modesto Solidarity picketed at the offices of John Hertle & EXIT Realty at 901 McHenry in Modesto. We did this to support Michele, one of our members, who had been illegally locked out of her apartment for over a week. Within minutes, we noticed a video camera filming us from inside, and several associates of John's came to ask us what was going on. We gave them a flier and told them that, as our previous demand letter had stated, we were there to demand Michele be given keys and safe access to her apartment. About fifteen minutes after this, John Hertle came out livid, demanding "who's the guy in charge here?!" After a brief confrontation in which we explained that no one was in charge, and we were all there to support Michele, he "invited" Michele in to talk. Several of us accompanied her, and after some deliberation an agreement was reached which ended in Michele being given the keys to her apartment."

Direct action gets the goods! If you are having problems with a boss or landlord, get in contact with Modesto Solidarity, or get your own family and friends out on the street. We only get what we are organized to take. For contact information and more info, check out the interview with Modesto Solidarity on page 33 of this issue!

July 6th: The Stockton Police Department building was the target of a drive-by shooting on a summer Wednesday night. Several rounds hit the pig-pen and police have no suspects in the shooting. According to the cops they, "don't have any clue who would shoot at the police department."

July 6th: In Merced inmates launched an uprising, burning beds inside their cells and injuring several guards. According to the Merced-Sun Star: *"Some correctional staff described the altercation as one of the worst they've ever seen at the jail. The melee began when recreation time was delayed so maintenance workers could replace light bulbs and solar panels," said Deputy Tom MacKenzie, sheriff's spokesman. When gang members in the east wing of the facility began lighting mattresses, sheets and toilet paper on fire and flooded the area using toilets… When [guards] moved into the cells to subdue the unruly inmates, they were met with opposition and several battles broke out. "These inmates had their mattresses wrapped around them and charged the door"...Several inmates suffered minor injuries when they were struck with shots from the less-lethal shotgun and pepper-ball munitions."*

It is not known if the uprising was a response to a specific abuse or a reaction to overall conditions.

July 9th: On Saturday, June 9th, over 100 Modestans (including renters, homeless, and home-owners) attended a BBQ in Downtown Modesto in defiance of the recent closure of Paperboy Park (aka Rose Garden Park) to discuss ways to resist the new ordinances proposed by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Homelessness (BRCH). Over a year ago, a crowd about the same size gathered to protest the proposed park closure. Since then, those in power who originally helped shut down the park have called for even more attacks on public space and the homeless.

Currently, the BRCH proposes a private security force to police the parks, surveillance cameras placed throughout, to make food sharing a crime, and centralize all homeless services in one place. These proposals are coupled with a recent push to keep the homeless from traveling down La Loma Ave between Downtown and the Airport District where the Mission Shelter is located. These attacks represent an attempt to further control and police human movement, criminalizing everyday actions. They are aimed at pushing out the homeless, and ultimately all poor people, in an attempt to gentrify the area and make it safe for developers and business investors.

People pose for a group photo at Paperboy Park BBQ

Attendees at the BBQ discussed plans to resist the proposed ordinances and Modesto Copwatch gave a presentation on knowing your rights during police encounters and documenting police abuse. Besides the discussion, park-goers also enjoyed hot dogs, grilled corn, and BBQ chicken. The event started at 12 noon during the allowed "public" use of the park but lasted until 3pm, two full hours after which it became illegal to use the park. Friendships were strengthened and it was made clear that both homeless and working-class people who are reside in the Downtown area have common enemies and common interests. Together, we can work together against threats to public space and increased repression.

Protesters rally in support of Pelican Bay hunger strikers at the headquarters of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in Sacramento 25 July 2011

July 19th: In Sacramento, 200 people protested in solidarity with the ongoing hunger strike at the Pelican Bay state prison in Northern California. Protesters demonstrated outside of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and marched into the main office where they remained for over 40 minutes before police threatened them with arrest.

July 19th – 22nd: Protests took place in Stock-

ton, Manteca, and Sacramento around recent incidents of police brutality and murder. Protesters demanded answers and release of information regarding the deaths of those killed by regional police and CHP officers.

On Tuesday July 19th, over 70 family, friends, and community members converged on the Manteca City Council, demanding answers concerning the shooting death of Ernest Dueñez Jr. Also attending the march were several members of James Rivera's and Rita Elias's families. Ernest was killed by Manteca police earlier in July. Family of Ernesto report that the officer responsible for the fatal shooting was placed back on the force only two weeks after the killing. They demanded the release of the officer's name, as well as video that was taken during the shooting. According to a statement released by the family:

Protesters march on Manteca's City Council after Ernest Duenez is killed

"According to several witnesses, Ernest posed no threat to the officer as he exited the back of the truck with his hands up. His leg became entangled in the seatbelt and as he fell to the ground he was shot by the officer without hesitation. Each wound was lethal, including the final shot to the face. The officer made the decision to use excessive deadly force with such disregard for my cousin's life."

In West Sacramento on Wednesday, July 20th, people rallied against Sacramento police who brutally beat one man while responding to a fight on July 17th. Police arrived and beat the man, then pushed his wife and their infant child to the ground. The man later received crutches due to injuries sustained during the attack. Close by, another man was filming the incident and police arrested him and took his camera. He now sits in a jail cell awaiting deportation. According to a post on IndyBay.org:

"On Sunday July 17th, West Sacramento resident Jesus Castro was arrested and had his camera confiscated by West Sacramento police while videotaping an incident of police brutality. Mr. Castro, who is undocumented, now faces deportation and is currently being held at Yolo County Jail. This follows a pattern of police brutality and discrimination in Yolo County, especially in West Sacramento, where the Latino community has been under siege for several years. This includes so-called gang injunction, which specifically targets Latino youth, forbidding them from dressing in certain colors that the short-sighted authorities believe identifies them as gang members, as well as depriving them of their freedom of association."

Protesters gather outside the San Joaquin County Courthouse on the first anniversary of the murder of James Rivera

Sacramento police claim their own camera did not capture the beating, since the cameras were turned away from the incident, and they are not releasing the footage of the arrested cameraman, Jesus Castro. It has also been reported by attorneys that Castro's cell-phone footage has been erased, most likely by the police.

On Friday, July 22nd, between 100 and 150 family members, friends, and supporters braved the hot Stockton streets to demonstrate and remember the brutal shooting death of James Rivera in 2010. Protesters rallied outside of the Stockton Police Department HQ and then proceeded to march through Downtown Stockton to the District Attorney's office. Various speakers addressed the crowd and later in

Jesus Castro is facing deportation for filming the beating of this man by West Sacramento Police.

the day a BBQ and vigil were held to commemorate James' life.

While these struggles all strive for similar things: the releasing of video footage, the finishing of an investigation, they have succeeded in connecting so many people across a very wide region. They have brought together families and friends, black, white, brown, and more, around a shared experience of police brutality and terror. Together, we can support each other's struggles and share strength and numbers in the battles that we face in our respective cities.

July 23rd: Around 40-50 people gathered in Downtown Modesto at 10th and J Street to reclaim public space, eat, listen to music, and discuss revolutionary ideas at the 'Anarchist Café.' Speakers addressed the crowd about gentrification, police brutality, recent actions and ongoing struggles.

August 18th: According to a post left on Indybay.org around midnight, person(s) unknown threw molotov cocktails into the South-west Fresno Police substation, burning at least two police cars. The action was carried out during a week of action against police brutality and murder and was done in solidarity with people resisting in the bay area.

The action also brought attention to recent police murders in Fresno, including Carl Maggioroni who was killed in the Tower District on August 3rd. A recent protest in Fresno on August 1st demanded that Police Chief Dyer resign. Dyer has faced many scandals, including allegations that he had sex with a 16 year-old girl while he was a 26-year old cop, and accusations of racism. According to the Fresno Brown Berets, 52 (adding Carl Maggioroni) people have died under Dyers administration in the last 14 years. The full text from the communique is re-posted here:

"In Solidarity with Everyone fighting against police brutality and the police state, molotovs were thrown into the parking lot of the Fresno SW substation where police cars and pig's personal vehicles are parked. At least 2 cars burned.

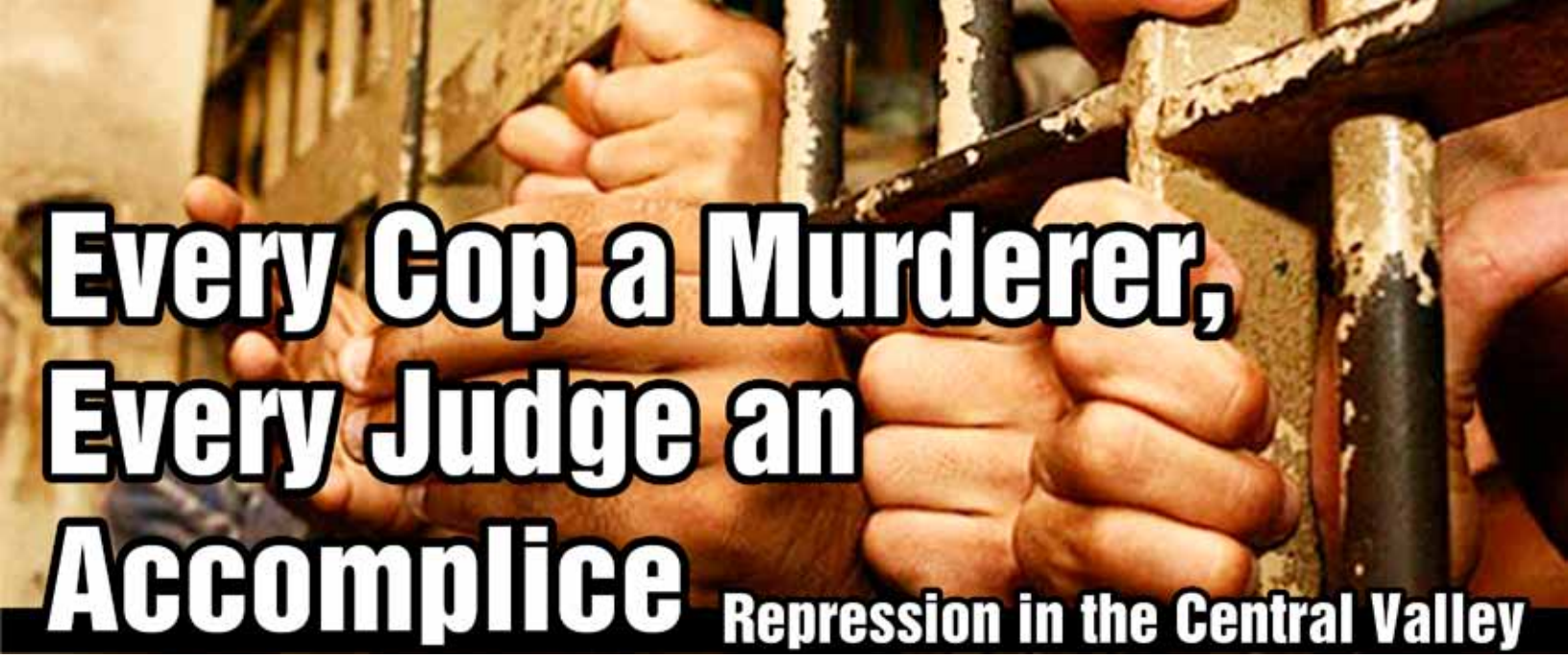
This action is done in solidarity especially with those in the East Bay standing up against the murderous BART police who most recently executed Charles Hill. BART then used fascist type methods by shutting down all cell phones in stations where they thought protestors might be showing up. WE WILL NOT BE SILENCED!

All police are murderers. FPD recently executed Carl Maggioroni and have a reputation for executing people of color whether they are armed or not. The time to fight back is NOW! We live in a police state, this is all "business as usual" for them. We have to come together and fight back, FUCK THESE PIGS! This is war, play time is over, join the fight.

In solidarity with Oakland, Seattle, Chile, London, Greece...everyone who is fighting back.

See you in the streets."

Welcome to
People gather at 10th Street Place
in downtown Modesto for Anarchist Cafe in a reclamation of public space 23 July 2011



Every Cop a Murderer, Every Judge an Accomplice

Repression in the Central Valley

Valley Law Enforcement Kills Again: In late March, an off-duty California Highway Patrol officer killed a 19-year old California State University Stanislaus student in a housing development off of East Briggsmore Avenue in Central Modesto. The victim was Ricky Miranda, who earlier the same day was admitted to the Doctors Behavioral Health Center in Modesto after he became distraught and threatened to hurt himself. He later escaped, crossing a canal and evading police. According to witnesses, Miranda attempted to enter several homes and in the process, broke a window. Miranda took a piece of glass from the broken window and began to cut his own throat. According to the Modesto Bee, an off-duty CHP officer then: "Contacted the man. The officer shot the man, who was taken to a hospital where he died of his injuries."

In late May, Modesto Police shot and killed Jeremy Atkinson after responding to a call about an armed robbery at a convenience store on Coffee road. While chasing Atkinson, police allege that Atkinson reached into his waistband and that they then fired in self-defense. Later, according to the Modesto Bee: "A knife was found near the body of the man shot by a Modesto police officer last week, and the loaded rifle police say he used to rob a convenience store was recovered in a nearby field," police said Tuesday.

In early June, Ernest Duenez Jr., a Chicano man, was shot and killed by Manteca Police. Duenez's cousin writes:

"On June 8, 2011 my cousin Ernest Duenez Jr was unarmed and fatally shot multiple times in the body and face by a Manteca Police Officer in San Joaquin County. According to several witnesses, Ernest posed no threat to the officer as he exited the back of the truck with his hands up. His leg became entangled in the seatbelt and as he fell to the ground he was shot by the officer without hesitation. Each shot ensuring death being the only outcome for Ernest including the final shot to the face."

In early July, three CHP officers, using semi-automatic rifles, gunned down and killed Eric Vigen, an unarmed and mentally-disturbed man, shooting him 55 times. The attack happened on Saturday, June 18th, on Crows Landing and West Main, several miles south of Modesto. According to Vigen's family, Eric had bipolar disorder and was in a manic state before the shooting. He had also made comments that he wanted to get into a shootout with the police and that he was armed with a weapon. Thinking that law enforcement could help her son as they had done in the past, Eric's mother called police and told them that he was possibly armed and in need of help. Eric's family was given the murderous details of his untimely death in a report by the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department.

Modesto Police Gain Accreditation While Officers Rack-Up Charges: With few surprises, the Modesto Police Department gained accreditation from Commission for Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), a collection of professional law enforcement associations. The accreditation process cost Modesto tax-payers $94,000.

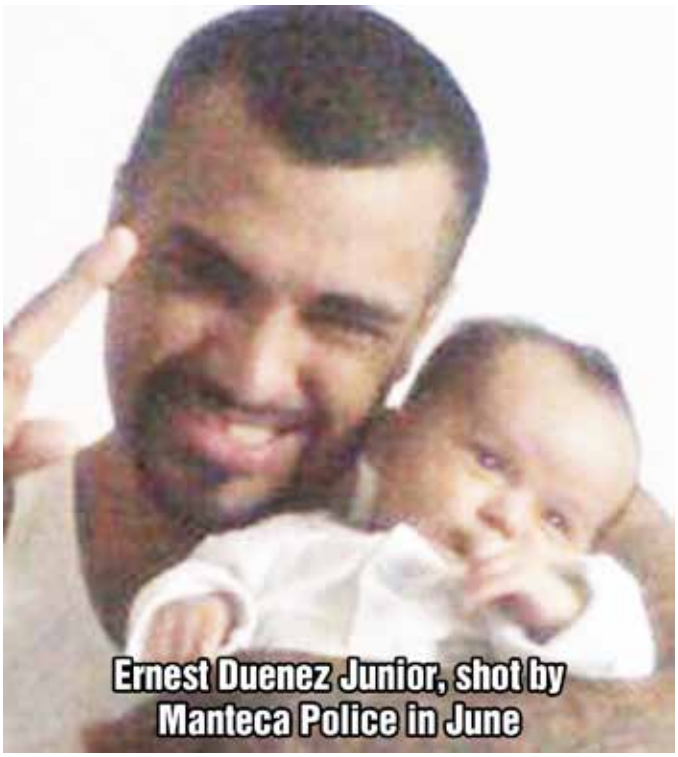
At the same time, some Modesto police officers are facing charges ranging from drunk driving to spousal abuse. Officer Todd Parsons was recently arrested for drunk driving and was so intoxicated that he crashed his car off of Scenic Blvd. Officer Matt Spurlock faces spousal abuse charges

and Officer Tony Trock was arrested for taking drugs from evidence.

Arrest of Stanislaus County Sheriff Kari Abbey Shows Network of Drugs, Weapons, Steroids, and Illegal Evictions: Stanislaus County Sheriff Kari Abbey was arrested and charged with second-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter for the shooting of Rita Elias, a mother and resident of West-Side Modesto. Elias was murdered by Abbey in September of 2010 during an argument in which Abbey attempted to evict Elias from her West-Side Modesto apartment. Abbey's parents are landlords,and after analyzing documents released from the investigation, it seems evident that Kari, along with other law enforcement officers, have helped to illegally evict people. Abbey is also charged with conducting this "family business" while on the clock as a Sheriff. She was charged by the District Attorney's office after witnesses came forward about the shooting, although it appears that the Sheriff's Department has known of these witnesses and their testimony for a long time.

According to the Modesto Bee:

"In court documents, the Stanislaus County district attorney's office said Abbey abused tenants at her rental properties, used fellow deputies to serve eviction papers while they were on duty and conducted her business on county time. In addition, a March 30 search of the home and outbuildings she shared with her husband and father yielded a sophisticated marijuana growing system, several weapons,



counterfeit bills, steroids and items from the Hayward Police Department. Abbey's husband, Bennie Taylor, worked for the Hayward police until last year. Investigators said Abbey and Taylor trespassed on properties they owned and managed, harassing and intimidating tenants, assaulting at least one of them. One tenant called police after Taylor hit him, the affidavit said. Witnesses said the Modesto police officer who responded to the call seemed familiar with Abbey, hugging her and shaking Taylor's hand."

Kari Abbey's bail was recently raised to $1,000,000, and she has been fired by the Sheriff's department.

Large Raid on Immigrants in Southside as Sheriffs are set to Make Money off Detention: According to a vendor who was interviewed by Modesto Anarcho in late July, a recent raid on the 7th Street Flea Market led to many people, including children, being rounded up by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) for deportation. The raid on the flea market was part of a larger crack-down by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) against DVD and CD bootleggers.

According to the Modesto Bee:

"Approximately 80 officers were involved in the raid. Besides the FBI, officers from the Stanislaus and Sacramento County Sheriff's Departments and the Sacramento High Tech Crimes Task Force assisted."

What the Modesto Bee article failed to mention and what was reported to Modesto Anarcho by the witnesses, was that ICE agents were also involved in the sting and arrested several people on suspicion of being undocumented. According to the vendor who was interviewed, when FBI agents moved through the market taking bootlegged products, ICE agents also rounded up people who were in the general area, including several young children. According to witnesses, this is the second law enforcement raid on the flea market in the last year.

As reported by residents of South-Side of Modesto who attend the Flea Market, many local residents already carry their "papers" or legal documentation with them at all times. Many people are afraid that they will be stopped by the police at any time and be asked for their IDs. If they do not produce their IDs (it is not illegal in California to not have an ID, but police can bring you down to the station if they think they need to obtain your information), people fear that they will be taken by the police and deported. Since California law does not require one to carry their ID at all times, police need a pretext for stopping someone and then obtaining their information (and then determining if they are 'illegal' or not).

ICE
US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
POLICE
ICE
POLICE
Immigration and Customs Enforcement was formed in 2003 as a successor to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Unfortunately, many police will ask you for ID with no prior reason or motivation, and expect you to simply consent and hand it over. While of course they are not supposed to do this, refusing to show your ID is often taken as grounds for suspicion. They often also ask if you are on probation or parole, which would give them the right to stop and question you. For instance, around the same time as the raid on the Flea Market, a Grayson resident who was later interviewed by Modesto Anarcho reported that local police were doing random searches and patrolling the neighborhood in cars, asking residents walking down the street for IDs or if they were on probation or parole. On top of instilling fear in people, these practices give the police the chance to catch people on minimal parole violations as well as find individuals who may be in the US without proper paperwork. These sweeps also serve to keep people locked into ghettos and make them afraid to organize and fight back.

Checkpoints are being used more frequently as a tactic for law enforcement to try and find people without papers. At a DUI check point, officers ask to see a persons driver's license and whether or not the person has been drinking.They also serve as a way of seeing if a person is on probation or an immigrant. Checkpoints often give police the opportunity to conduct warrant-less searches of cars or repossessions after immigration arrests. Checkpoints aren't just a means to check immigrants; they generate millions in revenue through fines, tickets and the sale of repossessed cars.

Recently, Stanislaus County Sheriff Adam Christianson, backed by Board of Supervisor member Bill O'Brien (CEO of O'Brien's markets), have lobbied the federal government to turn the empty beds in the Stanislaus County jail into make-shift holding facilities for immigrant detainees. The jail would be 'rented-out' to the federal government and would generate money for the county through the detention of people deemed to be 'illegal' by local law enforcement.

The Modesto Bee reports:

"Christianson confirmed a preliminary agreement with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. A final deal could be inked in three or four months, he said. ICE would pay the county $110 per day for each "civil detainee," many awaiting hearings for deportation at federal courthouses in Sacramento, Fresno or San Francisco."

In other words, when people are arrested by law enforcement, they must await deportation hearings by the Federal Government. While waiting, the immigrants must be housed by some sort of prison system, and under Christianson's plan many people would be housed right here in downtown Modesto. Thus, people arrested for immigration violations would be sent to the Stanislaus County jail where they would generate money for the county just by being imprisoned. This would include people stopped in checkpoints, at raids on flea markets, or those stopped on the street by police. Allowing the county to profit directly from sweeping people up in this way only encourages law enforcement to further abuse the law.

When you type "Downtown Modesto" into a search engine, something interesting happens. The little green box that was once located at 15th and I Street is no longer there. That little green box used to represent a public park. Now, it simply doesn't exist. Where there used to be green, now there is only grey. The park in question was Paperboy Park (referred to by the Modesto Bee as McClatchey Park), and while it used to be open to everyone, all the time, it is now legally open to the public only from 11 AM - 1 PM. If you want to use the park beyond these times, you have to pay for it. Paperboy Park was shut down upon the request of local businesses and the Safety and Community Committee, (a sub-committee of the Modesto City Council), on which sits Vice Mayor and current Mayoral hopeful Brad Hawn and city councilman Joe Muratore. Muratore is a member of the La Loma Neighborhood Association, a group which has pushed for several anti-homeless initiatives such as the criminalization of dumpster-diving and the placing of surveillance cameras in public parks.

Recently, Muratore has formed the Blue Ribbon Commission on Homelessness made up of business leaders and local officials. Its purpose is to remove homeless people from the downtown area and get them out of public parks. Towards this end, Muratore and friends have called upon several time-honored tricks: criminalization of previously legal practices, surveillance, and the use of the police. What else will be re-drawn on Modesto's map? How can we ensure that we are the ones redrawing the lines?

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Homelessness (BRCH) presents itself as a collection of community leaders who advise the local government on how to find solutions to homelessness. The reality is much different. As Modesto Anarcho wrote in February of this year when the BRCH group formed:

"Some of the other people selected for the commission include many who are involved in organizations that already 'manage' and 'control' the homeless population, including representatives with the First Methodist Church, Renaissance Christian Center, and the Modesto Gospel Mission. Other selections include the Chief Deputy District Attorney and business people such as Frank Ploof, a consultant, and J. David Wright, a business owner of Farmers Insurance. Rounding out the group is Vanessa Czopek, who is a librarian at the County Library."

The group proposes that all local services for the homeless should be combined and executed in one location. This is designed to have two effects: the first would be to remove the homeless from public parks, and the second would be to criminalize the practice of sharing food in public areas. In order to stop homeless people from using the parks and to herd them into areas where services would be sanctioned by the city, the BRCH would like to have private security (such as those that patrol the La Loma area, who answer only to the La Loma Neighborhood Association) patrol the parks and install surveillance cameras. According to the Modesto Bee:

"David Wright, an insurance-business owner who is chairman of the committee, said members have talked with other cities such as Santa Maria, which is using park safety officers to control the homeless. The unarmed peace officers patrol the parks, enforce the rules and respond to problems. The committee likes the program, and has also talked about using cameras to monitor parks in Modesto."

Thus, in the same way the hated HR-4437 law of

2006 would have further-criminalized working-class migrants and those that would help them, Muratore's proposed laws will further criminalize both the homeless and people who share resources like food and blankets with them. The movement of the homeless population would also be significantly more controlled and policed, both in parks and on the street. In a recent interview with a local homeless person who used to frequent Paperboy Park, Modesto Anarcho was told that the Gospel Mission, the larger of two local homeless shelters was advising people to travel down James Street to Yosemite Blvd, as a way of avoiding La Loma Ave. In the same interview, this person described a recent attack by police while looking for cans in an alley close to Graceada Park. When asked by a police officer for an ID, the homeless individual was struck in the head. The police officer then released this individual when he thought he was being recorded. It would appear that this 'class apartheid' is already in effect. Come into a rich neighborhood – take a beating.

A banner at Paperboy Park during a BBQ aimed at reclaiming public space.

As many people have been saying for years, the La Loma and College Neighborhood Associations are pushing for the privatization of public parks such as Graceada. If the proposed homeless rules were put into place by the City, the homeless would be policed in parks not only by MPD but also by private security, be constantly monitored through a surveillance network, have their movements restricted from rich neighborhoods, and also kept out of public space. Coupled with the laws already on the books aimed at harassing the homeless — anti-camping ordinances, the ban on dumpster-diving, and anti-panhandling codes — Modesto has a barrage of very useful tools at their disposal for 'fighting homelessness.'

At the same time as business and political interests in the city push for increased policing powers in public spaces, restriction of freedom of movement, and criminalization of mutual aid, the working-class of Modesto have been hit by wave after wave of budget cuts. While we have reported on budget cuts and fee hikes — often referred to as austerity measures — such as raising co-pays at medical clinics and shutting down schools, the most recent round of budget cuts eliminate many programs aimed at children in some of the most impoverished areas of Modesto. These measures include closing summer pools and shutting down breakfast and lunch programs, in addition to severely limiting child care subsidy programs, pushing daytime childcare firmly out of reach for many working class families. In Westside, Southside, and the Airport communities, these programs were aimed at poor and working class youth: people often the most at risk of becoming homeless. Furthermore, with these programs ending and the increased militarization of public space in Modesto, youth will have less of a reason to be out in public parks. In fact, the BRCH even stated that putting a damper on graffiti and other associated youth 'crimes' is another goal of the proposed surveillance and policing measures. As the summer drags on and youth in Modesto's poorest areas are left with few resources, little chances of finding a job, and an increased police presence, they too will become the targets of the city's war on the poor.

The future of Downtown Modesto will bring heavily policed public space, restricted human movement, and a hugely divided class system. If we desire to see something different then we must get organized, homeless, renters, and homeowners alike, and stop ourselves from literally being wiped off the map.

Towards the end of the summer, the BRCH released "it's findings," after months of "studying" the homeless problem. They proposed that a city wide ban on food sharing "at this time" was not realistic, however if they could enforce the laws already on the books banning food sharing without permits, they could have the same effect: drive the homeless out. Being that the police are stretched too thin due to cuts, the BRCH proposed that instead a private security force paid for by donations from residents in upper-middle class neighborhoods in Modesto be utilized to patrol parks such those in La Loma and Graceada in the College Neighborhood. The BRCH is attempting to sell this private security operation as simply a way to make public parks safer - this is a smokescreen. If safety in public parks was the goal, then why are parks in some of the most upper-middle class parts of the city targeted first? It's because the goal of having a private security force has nothing to do with safety and everything to do with keeping undesirable people out of the parks. We have to get organized and fight back against this encroachment, revealing this development for the naked class war that it is.

Government Thieves

How Local Politicans Are Stealing Public Funds

Recently, local politicians and those on the city council have called for a "tough-on-homeless" approach. Citing the threat of crime, business people and politicians like Mike Moradian and Councilman Joe Muratore would like to make public parks private and have a private police force patrol them. In doing so, they tell us that crime would be reduced and the homeless would be driven out of the downtown. Of course, this has nothing to do with creating a safer community and everything to do with making the area safe for business investors; investors that people like Muratore represent and can make money off of. Furthermore, a recent scandal in the city's power structure shows that the local elites have been breaking their own laws; laws which could land some of them in jail.

Since early 2009, local politicians have been profiting from government funds aimed at fighting the depressed housing market. Recently, a group of nonprofits, government agencies, and faith-based organizations have been accused of severe mismanagement and embezzlement of federal funds that were meant to create jobs and provide housing for poor and working people. After information was leaked from an insider, many city and community bureaucrats have been placed in the spotlight, causing a scandal within the local power structure. While working class people in the Valley have been forced to work jobs for statistically lower and lower pay, and many can't afford basic housing costs, local officials and business elites and have been lining their pockets with public money.

According to the City's website[1], "Modesto applied for and received $25 million from the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program to be distributed through the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) to help create jobs and stabilize declining property values in neighborhoods." This money should have gone to benefit potential homeowners and renters with incomes between 50-120% of Area Median Income ($24,275 - $58,260 for Stanislaus County[2]), and local contractors and laborers who would do necessary repairs. This of course has not been the case.

On July 10th, HUD received an anonymous e-mail from a Stanislaus Housing & Support Services Collaborative member outlining their concerns [3]. The veteran member of more than five years[3] requested that their name be kept confidential for fear of being fired[3]. According to the Modesto Bee, The document contained the following claims[3]:

- *"Three members of the executive committee work for agencies that receive HUD Supportive Housing Program grants, "yet provide supposed oversight and review of their own projects with no input from the" collaborative.[3]*
- *Executive committee members Gibbs, Michele Gonzales and Glenn Hutsell "rigged" the application review process to get funding for their "pet projects" year after year.[3]*
- *The executive committee failed to review whether HUD grant recipients were complying with a grant's requirements. If they had done so, they would have spotted the problems at Community Housing and Shelter Services, a Modesto nonprofit that nearly closed because of mismanagement.[3]*
- *The Homeless Management Information System, a software program designed to record and store information about the homeless and their needs,*

still is not running after four years.[3]

- *Some executive committee members provided fraudulent information on a 2010 HUD grant application.[3]"*

All this of course, goes against basic HUD guidelines[4], designed to prevent influence in the decision-making process and financial gain or other benefits from receiving grant funds. This new information, regardless of merit, was enough for HUD's Office of Inspector General (OIG) to take a closer look.[5]

Because of the conflicts of interest involving city officials and their private enterprises, the OIG may take as long as six to nine months to complete the investigation[6]. Julie Hannon with the Modesto Parks, Recreation and Neighborhoods confirmed that SCAP received more than $7 million in taxpayer dollars to renovate 21 foreclosed homes[7]. It was later discovered, as KCRA.com reported, that"Stanislaus County Community Assistance Program is being criticized for allowing family and staff to live in government-subsidized homes that are supposed to be for low-income residents."[7]

Hannon confirmed [8] that Denise Gibbs' parents were living at 913 Rumble Road after $340,000 in taxpayer money was spent buying and renovating the 2,383-square-foot home, and that four to five other homes were occupied by SCAP employees or their relatives[8]. An auditing firm, Moss Adams, that works for the City Council was supposed to begin their investigation in July, but has since been replaced by the HUD's OIG[5]. Leo Briones, *"a Southern California political consultant who speaks for SCAP,"* [9], said the agency will cooperate with city auditors[10]. Members of the organization admit to the allegations and say that these acts are legal because the residents meet the income requirements of the program[8]. As reported in the Modesto Bee on July 6th, "All told, as many as six of the twenty houses renovated by SCAP have been occupied by employees of the agency or their family members. According to SCAP's agreement with the city, the homes were supposed to serve as rental housing for people with special needs, such as seniors, people with debilitating diseases, or families at risk of homelessness." [11]

Joe Gibbs, Grant Writer and Development Director for SCAP[3], received a bonus of more than $637,000 for writing grant proposals according to the Modesto Bee [12]. This is on top of his regular pay. That's $637,000 of public money, which was supposed to go towards helping Modesto families but instead went to an official who was already highly paid. In fact, Joe and his wife Denise are SCAP's two highest-paid employees[13], raking in more than $712,000 last year[12], and more than $1.32 million in four years[12]. After the Modesto Bee revealed how much he was earning[12], Gibbs agreed to forgo $436,471 of what he said he was owed [14]. In doing so, he claimed that his *"contractual agreement was made with fairness and proper legal standards in mind,[12]"* although Pastor Darryl Fair, Chairman of SCAP's Board of Directors, says that after *"reviewing SCAP's financial data for the year 2010, the board realized… the 4 percent incentive to our director of business and program development exceeded what was appropriate for a nonprofit agency to offer."* [12]

The same Darryl Fair has recently resigned from Stanislaus Housing & Support Services Collaborative's executive committee, along with at least five others that may or may not include Gibbs[10]. SCAP's new board includes Chairman Jonathan Dattilio of Lincoln, Vice Chairman Patrick Pokorny of Riverbank, Secretary Daniel Malakauskas of Stockton, and Tom Drury of Modesto [10]. They are also currently recruiting others in order to meet their guidelines of seven members[10].

On August 2nd, the city notified Councilman Joe Muratore[15] and his business partner Ryan Swehla[15] of a likely conflict of interest after it was found that Benchmark Commercial Real Estate Services, which they own together[15], was paid a $62,500 commission[15] for the sale of an apartment complex to Trinity Renovations[15], which is also co-owned with Swehla[15]. Trinity also hired Mike Moradian to complete the property inspections through his company Peace of Mind Home Inspections[16]. Moradian is the President of the La Loma Neighborhood Association (LLNA) [17] and sits on the city's Blue Ribbon Commission on Homelessness [18] (see The New Map of Modesto in Modesto Anarcho #17 for more information). Moradian has been a fierce crusader against homelessness, trying to shut down the expansion of a drug and alcohol treatment center in the Airport District [17] and helping to push anti-homeless initiatives in the city. Both Moradian and Swehla also played a major role in getting Muratore on the council back in 2009 through their influence with the LLNA[19], and the group no longer retains its non-profit status[20]. Benchmark and Trinity were thus nicely poised to funnel funds into the personal bank accounts of government sponsored thieves and their elitist friends.

As it was reported in the Modesto Bee on August 18th, Muratore was also found guilty of illegally voting in the council decision that initially allowed the city to accept federal housing funds[15]. Since then, Trinity has had it's NSP funds frozen[6] and been barred from working with the HUD program[6]. Muratore admitted guilt to the accusation and the $62,500 commission has been returned[6]. At a Modesto City Council meeting regarding SCAP on August 3rd, 2011, Muratore said he promptly had his attorney notify the California Fair Political Practices Commission after checking logs and "discovering" that he had placed a vote [15]. The FPPC response was a warning letter with no administrative prosecution or fines[15]. Muratore said that at the time that he was as an inexperienced official when he had made the vote.[15]

But, while this Harvard grad plays dumb, Muratore may face federal prosecution or at the least his expulsion from the council. It's also telling that while businessmen like Muratore and Moradian have called for a 'tough on homeless' approach, including a recent push to have a private security force patrol the parks for homeless people, they have broken more laws than any homeless person with an open container. While they attract support from the upper-middle and some of the working classes through a tough on crime stance, in reality they only care about the law when it rules in their favor. For rich elites like Muratore and Moradian, the law and the police are instruments to use at their will, and against us. Moradian and Muratore's "tough on crime" façade is just a smokescreen for a push to gentrify and develop the downtown; free of lower and working class elements. Surely, just as they have used the SCAP, they will seek to make money from this displacement of poor people as well. Hopefully this scandal exposes people to the swindlers that people like Muratore and all his friends are; willing to take public money that is designed to help people and make themselves even richer.

The current SCAP scandal, just as the current crisis unfolding with the Modesto Police Department and the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department, shows us several things. Firstly, that those in power have organized amongst each other in order to siphon money out of the public's hands and straight into their pockets. The politicians get the deals, and then have their companies or their friends' companies do the work, looking the other way when they take hundreds of thousands of dollars right off the top. Secondly, this scandal proves that those masquerading as our "leaders" have never had our interests at heart. This isn't a problem of a few bad apples, but a whole rotten tree. The network of business interests and political big-wigs all needs to be pushed out and overthrown. Thirdly, the corruption going on at City Hall is the same as that within the Federal Government and corporations. Our money goes to fund wars and the bailout of banks, while the CEOs kick back and make record-breaking profits. We must take power into our own hands; we must not wait for the elites in downtown Modesto or Washington D.C. to swindle us again while people are without money, food, and shelter.

The time is now to take what we need and occupy it. We shouldn't wait for government officials to screw us over when we can take over hundreds of abandoned foreclosed houses and apartment units ourselves. Talk with neighbors, agree not to call the police, fix the place up, move right in. If an eviction notice comes, tell the bank to shove it. Get together with family and neighbors to drive off inspectors and the cops. Our neighborhoods become vacant save for boarded-up buildings while the bankers grow rich and the Muratores of the world do as they please. Its time for all of them to go, and for all of us to bring this corrupt system down.

Due to printing constraints, the full citations for this article are available on our blog at: **http://www.modestoanarcho.org/2011/09/government-sponsored-thieves-how-local.html**

Fish Wrapping and Flyswatters

The State of Media in Modesto

With the minimal or incorrect coverage of the recent police shootings of mentally unstable individuals and the trial of Modesto Sheriff Detective Kari Abbey for the murder of Rita Elias, it has been become apparent that The Modesto Bee, one of the largest newspapers in the Central Valley, is sorely lacking in investigative reporting, and has interests that conflict with its responsibilities as a watchdog within the community. This unfortunate reality begs the question: where is the legitimate alternative media in Modesto and the Central Valley to tell the stories that are not being told?

It's not as if The Modesto Bee is a shining example of yellow journalism: it is not. While it succeeds in mostly avoiding sensationalism it fails on what should be considered its foremost goal of finding the truth, against tough odds, with all of veracity's villainous forms: the corrupt politicians, the greedy developers, the egomaniacal law officials.

For example, one of the most outrageous police brutality cases in recent history happened in Modesto in June 2011. Three California Highway Patrol officers killed an unarmed, mentally unstable man by shooting him 55 times. The Bee did one initial story on the incident about two weeks after the shooting took place. The public has yet to learn the details of the incident, like whether the officers will be held responsible for their brutal use of force and if the family of the victim will receive an apology from the department. In addition to questioning why the Bee does not report more thoroughly on police brutality, one can question why other media outlets ignore these stories as well.

The "alternative media" that exists in Modesto is an absolute derision to the community these media outlets claim to represent. ModestoView, a monthly tabloid magazine owned and published by Chris Murphy, boasts that it has been Modesto's independent guide for the community since 1997. It only reports on the "positive" events in Modesto. Take a look at one of its editions. ModestoView's articles are poorly spelled, unorganized reviews and two-bit stories about prominent restaurants and festivals to make their advertisers happy.

But ModestoView is not the worst alternative media source in Modesto. Media as masturbation takes pen and ink form in the semi-monthly, full-color newspaper/magazine Zorch, amounting to badly Photoshopped girls in bikinis and full-page ads (really, that's about it). What does Zorch add to the conversation about the human experience of living in the Central Valley? It would be one thing if Modesto was a place of robust alternative media sources, than perhaps it would not bother most people that the owner and publisher of Zorch is really just playing around and calling the publication "satire" and laughing all the way to the bank, while not really understanding that satire provides social criticism through wit, something not found in Zorch. However, the Central Valley is sorely lacking publications of substance. When money and time are of no concern, which certainly seems to be the case with Zorch, why not create a product that provides what is desperately needed—an alternative publication willing to take on the gritty stories while being a voice of opposition to the mainstream media, representing the diverse community of the Central Valley? It is heartbreaking to believe that a rich, white guy would spend time and money to create and print this drivel, when so much more is possible.

It does not stop with these print publications, because while both ModestoView and Zorch have websites

with an infinite amount of space to tell interesting stories, its mostly just the printed product on a screen, and as much one would like to applaud the Voice of Modesto for its so-called investigative reporting and whistle blowing, the website is sad substitute for good reporting. It's a pile of sandbags when the Hoover Dam is needed.

In some ways, the Voice of Modesto causes greater harm to the community than ModestoView or Zorch because it touts its rebel mantra as a source for good information about the city and all its sleaziness. But its roots are evident: disgruntled ex-public employees (and a former-mayor-cum-publisher to boot) with their own agendas. Its one redemptive quality is that it occasionaly brings to light legitimate questions such as "Hey, why are the police paid so much?" and "What's with all these policies against the homeless?" People may point to it defensively saying, "yes, there is a legitimate alternative news source, just look, they are talking about how corrupt cops are!" Yet it does not go beyond initial finger pointing to the root of the issues, it does not involve different perspectives, and most importantly for an alternative media source, it does not provide solutions to solving our community's problems.

With the depressing reality of alternative media in Modesto, where can one go for good information and interesting stories about the community? It's about time Modesto supports a legitimate alternative newspaper, such as Seattle's The Stranger, or the Bay Area's San Francisco Bay Guardian. With a population well over 200,000 and a growing youth population, Modesto has the right demographics to make an alternative paper viable.

First, it should pay its reporters a living wage to research and report investigative stories that shed light on important issues. Second, it should have a functioning website that allows for public opinion and forums on community topics. Third, it should be a sponsor and contributor to community events about the issues on which it reports. And lastly, it should be held accountable and should strive to push buttons and make people answer for their actions and opinions (especially those in elected office) through a legitimatized arena for discussion.

Ed Note: Mainstream media exists to prepetuate the power structure. We included this piece not because we believe we can hold those in power accountable, but because it points out that the indepenedent media in Modesto does nothing but sell ad-space and waste paper.

Prisoner Feedback

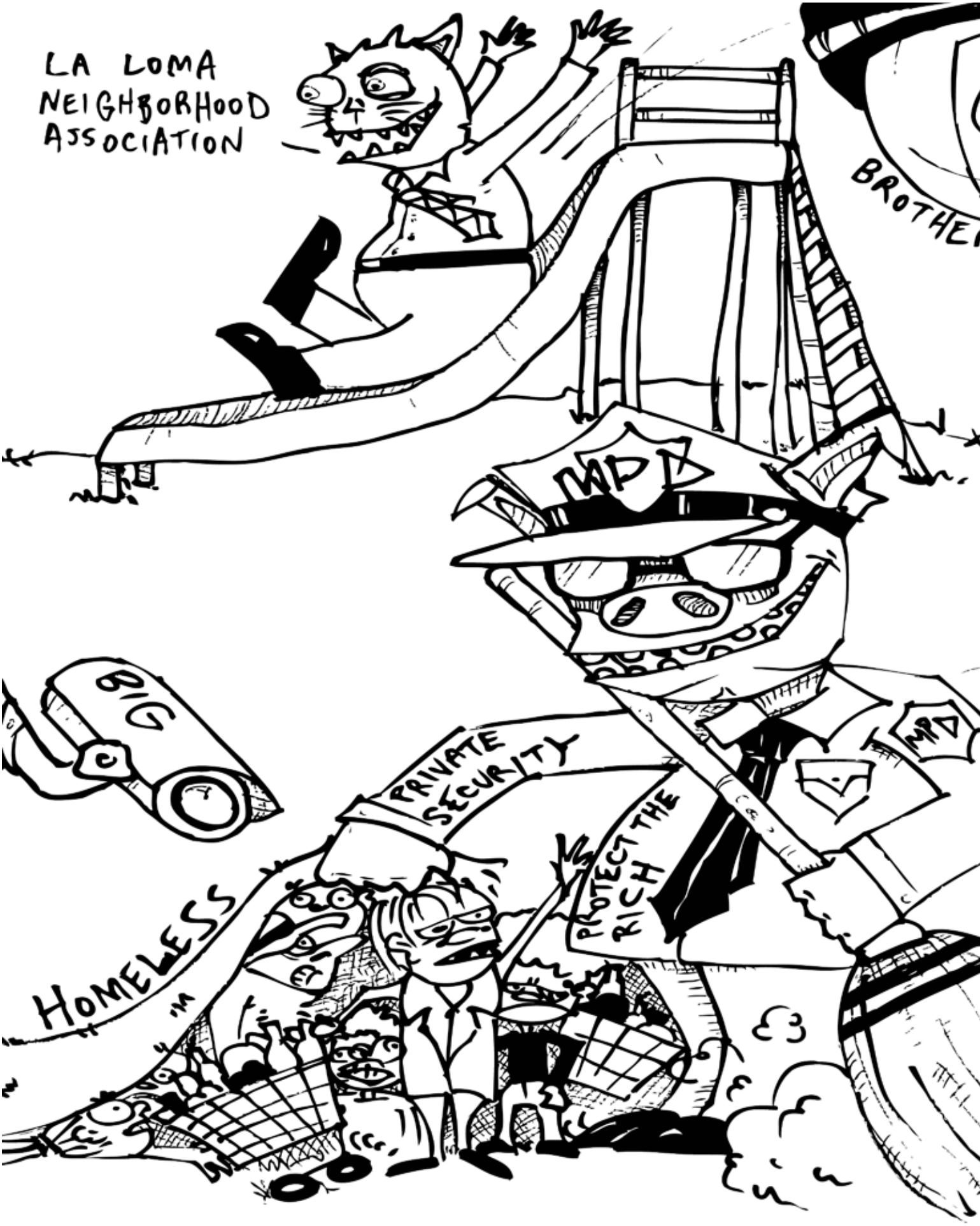
Modesto Anarcho,

First and foremost I send my love and respect to all of you full blast. I just wanted to send you my new address. I'm now here at the Tehachapi S.H.U. (Security Housing Unit). The prison guards at Susanville said they found a weapon stashed behind my locker. So they broke my ass off a 10-month S.H.U. term and 360 more days to do. Now my release date is in July 2013, and I'm more bitter towards the system than ever before. I'm doing my best to stay positive and keep a good attitude but it's not as easy as it sounds.

I went from a level one to a level four over night and it's a whole different world here in the S.H.U. I did get and enjoyed your last issue of the Modesto Anarcho. Thank you very much. You guys are the bomb. Please keep sending me your magazine and keep up the good work. If you have a little space in your next issue please print my information in it because I would like to find a pen-pal to write to. Please take real good care, and keep in touch. all mail is good mail.

Your friend,

Kenny Nelson #E-98126
4A-4B-201
P.O. Box 1902
Tehachapi, CA
93581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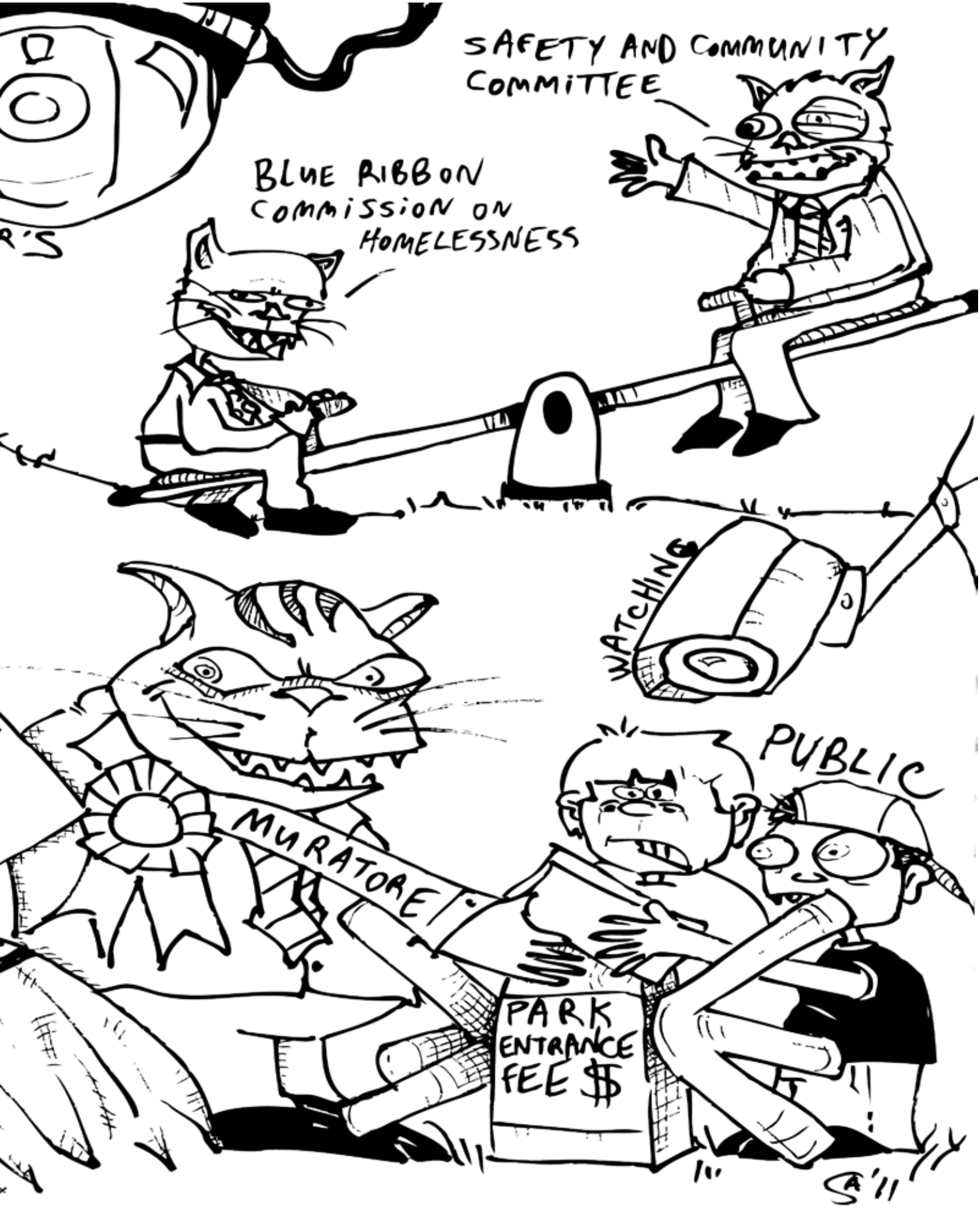

SAFETY AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS
WATCHING
PUBLIC
MURATORE!
PARK ENTRANCE FEE $

Spring Heats Up

Students Resist Budget Cuts at Modesto Junior College

In February of this year, it became clear that the Brown Budget would drastically cut funds from California's community colleges, as part of a larger attack on public education as a whole. Estimates as to how much would be cut from Modesto Junior College (MJC) ranged from $8-13 Million. MJC President Gaither Loewenstein & his Vice President of Instruction Karen Walters-Dunlap began to plan their austerity measures for the school. The administration plans to cut 8 full-time faculty members, and many more part-time faculty members, and to raise student fees from $26 per unit to at least $36 — and possibly as high as $66 — per unit. The directors of MJC have already made cuts to vocational training, media arts, and day care centers.

While there was some talk amongst faculty about how to counter this, and some wore black armbands in silent protest, the faculty association failed to organize any sort of material response, and it was not until students began organizing near the end of the month that things started to heat up. There were several disparate student-led protests held on campus, most of which were organized by or associated with the student government, the Associated Students of MJC (ASMJC). The last of these culminated in a crowd of 15-20 students marching to the President's Office, accompanied by MJC security. While this "confrontation," forced the President to cease his work and address the crowd in an hour-long speech-turned-Q&A, it was clear that the President had no interest in paying anything but lip service to students' concerns. He heard complaints, then invented responses on the spot which were tailored to fit the complaints, struggling not to contradict himself.

At this event, several fliers were circulated. One read, in part: *"Don't think for a second, students, that you are not workers. We work our jobs and then on our school work. We go to college to become workers with careers. Being that we are workers, it is our concern to recognize the fundamental contradiction in capitalism, and this is that capitalism absolutely requires workers to perpetuate and continue the production of capitalism, while at the same time it needs to destroy the workers as individuals and grind us down to mere doers that perform certain tasks in the hopes of a wage."*

Speaking to ideas on how to fight in the current terrain, another flyer stated: *"We must occupy the college, disrupting the ability of the administration to operate. Students and faculty must strike together, blocking the flow of human labor that keeps the school afloat. Solidarity is our strongest weapon, one that we must direct at our enemies."*

On Tuesday, March 1st a General Assembly was held on Campus during a student group's normal meeting time. Students talked about the budget cuts as proposed by President Loewenstein, and ways to resist them. During the course of the meeting, it was mentioned several times by self-appointed leaders who were loosely affiliated with ASMJC that anarchists were afoot, and must be feared. Anarchists, so their narrative went, were there specifically to "cause trouble, and break windows," and were described as "outside agitators." This fallacious idea was quickly discredited, by students both anarchist and otherwise. Yet one self-appointed leader, Steven Brewer, insisted on continuing his attempts to control the discussion. Whenever an idea was proposed which Steven didn't agree with, or which pushed the boundaries of the "proper channels," he would denounce them and attempt to return the dialogue to ideas which he had proposed or at least approved of. It was clear

that he had it in his head that he was a leader, that it was his responsibility to make decisions for everyone else, even when they disagreed with him.

Nearing the end, a walkout was planned for March 8th, the day before the Board of Trustees were set to vote on the President's budget proposal. While this idea was tacitly supported by nearly everyone in the room, it soon became clear that some were simply intending to oppose the walkout in other ways. As the meeting moved out of doors to allow a class to take place, Steven Brewer was seen talking to campus security, pointing individuals out in the crowd. Some of these individuals were later followed by security as they left campus, and harassed in a blatant attempt at intimidation. They asked for copies of fliers that had been handed out during the meeting, took pictures and video, and attempted to identify individuals.

Students rally outside of President Loewenstein's office at an early protest composed chiefly of student government

Later in the day, several students indicated that Steven had left the Assembly early, made his way to the Student Government office, and there ranted about anarchists trying to "rile up the crowd." Steven was swiftly called out as a snitch and a liar, particularly on several Facebook groups. One posting, in part, stated: *"While he tacitly supported the idea of a walkout during the meeting, as soon as it broke he ran to the cops. This is a dangerous individual: not only should he not be leading or facilitating meetings, he should not be allowed to participate. Steven's desire to be a leader has, apparently, superseded his desire to resist the budget cuts alongside his fellow students and working people. This struggle affects all of us, and by allowing junior politicians (or anyone) to lead or represent us, we give up our own agency and power to resist."*

These efforts by campus security mimic previous events at MJC. Previously in fall 2009, during the Student Occupation Movement, there was an attempt to organize a general assembly at MJC which was met with harsh repression. Students passing out fliers were threatened with arrest for refusing to identify themselves to security, memos and bulletins were sent out and posted around campus that those organizing the assembly were "up to no good," and on the day of the assembly (which was to be held in the Fireside Lounge), the space was packed with police, campus security, and MJC administration, stopping the meeting before it even had a chance to start. This kind of preventative repression proves just how scared those in the administration are of students, faculty, and campus workers getting together just to talk about their shared conditions.

However, neither snitches nor cops can stand between a desperate working class at the end of its rope and the hope for revolution. And so it was that the March 1st general assembly culminated in plans being laid out for a massive walkout to be held March 8th, the day before the Board of Governors voted on Loewenstein's budget proposal. The idea was to disrupt business as usual, to prove to ourselves and our enemies that we held the power to stop the campus from functioning, and that attacks by the administration could be met with a tangible resistance. The next day thousands of fliers were printed and distributed across campus, and over the next week the walkout was announced in many classrooms. Many of the faculty most-directly affected by the cuts supported the idea of the walkout.

Over the next week, campus security was on high alert. They increased their presence on campus during class hours, in an attempt to intimidate students from assembling or even passing out fliers. Further, students who campus security had visually identified as "troublemakers" were followed around the school and verbally harassed. Yet by Monday, August 7th, it was clear that nearly everyone on campus had at least heard of the walkout. And on Tuesday, several hundred students, workers, and and faculty interrupted their daily routines and amassed on the quad in front of the Morris Administration Building. For half an hour or more, protesters gave impromptu speeches detailing precisely how the cuts and layoffs would hurt them, decrying the president and his decisions.

After rallying, students marched around the campus, chanting, *"No Cuts, No Fees, Education Should Be Free,"* and *"They Say Cut Backs, We Say Fight Back!"* After

Students rally on the MJC quad at the walk-out on 08 March 2011

marching around the perimeter of the campus, the group then snaked through Pirates Village, drawing more students into the march and inspiring staff to come outside and voice their support for the protesters. Finding themselves numbered in the hundreds, students then marched through the student center and straight towards the Morris Building. After finding the doors in the front locked, students moved to the back and, on Loewenstein's orders, security quickly locked the doors for fear of students entering the building.

Students then moved to the Art Department, where the director of the gallery addressed the crowd. The students then decided to move downtown. At College and Needham, students flooded into the intersection and continued their march in the street. At one point, someone in the march slowly drove their car into the crowd, and several people began ghostriding. About a block before J Street, two police officers arrived on motorcycles and attempted to move the crowd onto the sidewalk. Students refused and held the street, moving up J Street and on to 10th Street Place. Surprising to the students, the Mayor of Modesto was also hosting a 'protest' of his own at the time, attended by city bureaucrats, head police, and Mayors of nearby cities, protesting Governor Brown's cuts to city redevelopment funds.

Stunned, the small group at the Mayor's rally dispersed, as students drowned out the loudspeakers by expressing their outrage towards those in suits. Students began chanting, *"Save Teachers, Cut Admins,"* and several speeches were made linking the Modesto Police to the MJC Security; both of which sought to stop students and workers from resisting the crisis. Students also noted the connection between local politicians and the administration of MJC. Student then headed back to the college, still chanting, with police and then campus security following close by.

This day was important for many reasons. Hundreds of students at Modesto Junior College walked out of class and rallied and marched for hours. Many faculty and staff were directly supportive of the walkout, allowing students to attend the event, promoting the event in class, and even dismissed their classes down so that students could attend. The messages of solidarity that were expressed at the rally in front of the Morris building also did much to strengthen the bonds between students and workers. The bravery that students expressed in the face of harassment by security and the administration who had spent the previous week intimidating students from joining the walkout, was inspiring. Students were fearless as they held the streets, even as the police attempted to remove them. And with courage, students stood up to the Mayor, Brad Hawn, and all the other city bureaucrats who slunk back into their rat holes rather than face an angry crowd of students.

On Wednesday, March 9th, protesters gathered early to picket the MJC Board of Governors meeting. Once inside, students, faculty, and classified staff lined up for a 2-minute shot at convincing the Board to reject the president's budget proposal. For hours, these people spoke about giving their lives to their programs, only needing one more semester to complete a program being cut, or being unable to continue work/school due to one service or another being cut (especially the day care center). At one point, an armed forces veteran and current student refused to stop speaking once their two-minute time spot was up. As Modesto Police officers grappled with him to remove him from the meeting, he shouted to remind the crowd that it took a gang of men with badges and guns to silence him. After three hours or so, the Board cut the public comment period short to deliver their decision.

Nearly every member spoke, singing the same song about how the decisions being made were difficult, and every possible avenue for preventing cuts had been explored.The student representative of the board attempted to add a clause to the proposal which would have made the cuts subject to reversal should adequate funding be found, but he was shut down immediately by senior members. The board not only approved the president's budget proposal, but it was additionally revealed that they had previously made their decision in closed session, before the public comment period. Although this was met with loud cries of

Students disrupt mayor's meeting, 08 March 2011

disapproval, it was clear that there was nought but disappointment and defeat in the crowd that night. Gone from the previous day's walkout was the spirit of defiance, gone was any sense of collective power. One by one, the audience filed out past police and campus security, past reporters, and back to their cars. While there was talk of continued protest, and at least one group of students attempted to occupy the library in an effort to keep the space open on cram night, this Board meeting marked the end of any visible resistance to the budget cuts.

Protesters supporting Wawona Daycare Center, a major target of President Loewenstein's budget

Throughout this struggle, student government and others fed the line that the "budget crisis" was larger than MJC or the Yosemite Community College District, and that the true culprits were politicians in Sacramento. By "taking the fight to Sacramento," they claimed, we would "get to the root of the cause," namely by convincing lawmakers in the legislature to increase funding to community colleges. Further, this logic was used to recuperate the feelings of students on campus, convincing them that there was simply nothing to be accomplished through protest or disruptions here in Modesto. Simultaneously, this excuses MJC administration (like President Loewenstein and his VP Walthers-Dunlap) from any sort of attention (and especially blame, anger, backlash), which clearly is inappropriate. As we see now, Loewenstein lied again and again, saying that he was dedicated to MJC and the larger community here in Modesto, while at the same time he was ravishing our school with outlandish cuts, only then to resign with the excuse of some embarrassing song lyrics from his youth. How much do you want to bet he gets another job, at another public college, and once again destroys the school in two years or less only to leave again.

While we would be remiss to pretend that the struggle over the budget at MJC is anything but a product of a class-based society which we call capitalism, and that politicians, as agent members of the ruling elite, have a key part in this, it is equally important to fight where we stand, to struggle in our world, on our terms. Loewenstein and his ilk have no interest in listening to our demands. He makes his money by administering schools in a way which maximizes profit rather than quality of education, which stacks hundreds of thousands of dollars on top of lavish car and housing allowances for administrators rather than funding art, social & vocational sciences, or services like affordable day care for students. As was stated in a flier circulated in late April:

"The interests of the administration and the interests shared by faculty and students, are opposed. We must force them to give... what we want. We must move into actual resistance which imposes our organized power as a material force. This is the only way to gain concessions and to also collectively resist capitalist society."

By *"taking the fight to Sacramento,"* and participating in the kinds of ritualized protest which typify March in March (an annual lobbying effort led by college and university student governments in California) we remove our agency from our own struggle, from our very lives. Not only should we blame President Loewenstein and Walters-Dunlap for their decisions which continue to impact our education and our lives (even after Loewenstein's departure), we should do whatever we have to do here in Modesto to get what we want, including walking out of and even disrupting class, organizing campus-wide strikes, and occupying the college, or otherwise preventing business as usual from taking place.

This year, MJC is set to suffer even worse budget cuts, as the entire state struggles to deal with the austerity measures implemented by Governor Brown. With President Loewenstein resigned, Acting President Walthers-Dunlap has not only enforced the previous year's cuts but is planning more. It is now up to the students and faculty of the college to determine whether to lay down and continue to suffer at the hands of rich administrators, or whether it is finally worth it to group up and fight back against these fuckers as a material force.

The YCCD Board of Trustees vote on President Loewenstein's proposal, 09 March 2011

The Protest Has No Clothes

Regarding the Recent Actions in Sacramento

"[T]he income gap between the rich and poor is wider than at almost any time in history and magnified by sudden wealth and lavish living of a growing elite." – Los Angeles Times

Less than a month ago, marchers from the bay-area descended on Sacramento under the slogan, "March, Strike, Occupy." Was the revolution here? Was massive change just around the corner? Why had people from across California taken up such a radical slogan (alright, it was originally 'Strike, Occupy, Takeover'), that before was only found within the student movement? The goal of the marchers: to bring a Wisconsin-style occupation to the steps of the state capital. While we were perplexed as to why you would announce such plans to the police ahead of time, we couldn't help but be intrigued. However, after the symbolic arrests were made, protesters cleared from the capitol grounds, and the union leaders finished giving their speeches – it was clear that the recent 'occupation' at the state capitol was simply more of the same. It was an attempt to get those in power to listen; to act on our demands. But if the police hauling you away wasn't clue enough as to how this system works…

The solution to the current budget crisis is not more taxes or taxing the right or even the richest people. These are all attempts at managing capitalism better; of "managing the disaster." We are not interested in slightly fewer border patrol guards and more taxes for schools from BP, we are interested in a social revolution in which people and their communities take back the land on which they live and create a completely new relationship with it. Where human labor is directed towards needs and not sold to those that own property for the sake of profit. The solution to the problems of austerity is attacking the problem at its source: the capitalist system. The crisis isn't brought on by a lack of "money;" the corporations have never had it this good, as Wall Street reports the highest gains in decades. The crisis was created by the constant boom and bust cycle of capitalism – a cycle that common workers constantly take the fall for and in the end, pay for.

Those who parade around as popular leaders want to smash organized labor and lower wages, they want to divide the working-class and further criminalize migrant workers, they want to drive up the costs of education and privatize it completely, they want to destroy every safety net and social program that currently exists. With the current financial crisis, they have their context. Thus, they tell us that *"we all need to bleed,"* while we become shriveled and they sit fat and torpid at the blood bank. Ultimately, they have the power of the law, the police, and the military on their side – we only have each other and our ability to get organized and collectively fight back. The question is: will we try and beg for a more 'kinder, gentler' system, or will we finally shovel the last bit of dirt onto the bourgeoisie and bury them for eternity? Everywhere the assault on poor and working people across the globe is becoming more naked and brutal.

Opening up the Modesto Bee, all one seems to read about is rising costs, the closure of schools, and laid-off workers. But it's not just here in the Central Valley: all across the United States schools are shutting down, services are being slashed, and access to benefits and programs are drying up. Meanwhile, we see privatization being touted as the best alternative and the unions, where they still exist, are doing nothing but trying to hold onto their dues money and their power. They are not interested in resisting; they're

interested in keeping their power and managing their business: the union itself.

While corporations rake in the highest revenues in decades, real wages are frozen and the cost of living continues to rise. Recently, Jerry Brown's administration proposed that the remaining budget deficit be covered by even more cuts to public education, low-income medical coverage, and social welfare programs.[ii] What's more, the Obama administration is proposing to axe $100 billion from the federal budget. This decision would have a massive impact on working-class students, because it would deny access to Pell Grants based on need.[iii] States such as Wisconsin have passed laws that make certain strike actions illegal, curtail the power of public-service unions, and reduce pay and benefits for employees. It's not just Republicans like Wisconsin's Governer Walker leading the charge against union members either. According to the blog Labor Notes:

"Politicians of both parties have been tough on public employees in this recession, balancing state and city budgets through layoffs, wage freezes, furloughs, and benefit cuts. But rarely have labor-backed Democrats targeted the very right of public employees to collectively bargain. That's now changing. In Massachusetts, New Jersey, Illinois, and Connecticut, Democratic legislators, eager to save money, are betting they can cut into public employee bargaining rights and still win union backing at election time."

Students are our Special Interest
Don't cut school funding
Protesters decry state budget cuts on the trek to Sacramento

At the same time, many states are also trying to pass racist legislation that would make it easier for states to deport migrant workers. Health and Education clinics like Planned Parenthood are losing funding and closing down, placing even more burdens on poor and working-class women by eliminating access to affordable health care. Everywhere there is social war: all across the terrain. We are participants in a global struggle between the working class and the elites. So then, where are our weapons?

The (oh-so) 'loyal' opposition, the Democrats and the trade unions, have done nothing to stop this assault. Of course, it is California Governor Brown's administration which has helped push through so much of these cuts and the union officials which have supported him. While much of the Left prepares for President Obama's next electoral battle, they are also attempting to keep our anger firmly within realm of the ballot box with tightly controlled demonstrations. The unions helped launch Brown into office by portraying him as a 'friend of the workers,' but it is both parties which are helping to destroy services and programs that workers and those in poverty depend on.

According to the major labor unions and the Democrats, our greatest current "hope" lies in the proposed tax extensions (which are simply continuations from Former California Governor Schwarzenegger's increased sales, income, and vehicle taxes) that will help stop cut from becoming deeper. As Dan Brown and David Conway wrote [ii]:

"The governor's tax proposals, like the austerity measures, have been supported by the trade unions. The California Teachers Association launched a campaign for the tax increases that culminated in "state of emergency" protests earlier in the month. The unions have repeated the line from Brown that the only alternative to the regressive taxes, mainly targeting working people, is massive cuts in K-12 education funding."

The message from both the unions and the government is the same: you pay either way, either through increased taxes or further budget cuts. This isn't a solution – it's a threat! We are forced to choose between taxes and further cuts, yet the real question is: will we do nothing, or will we revolt? And, even if the taxes are extended, Brown and the rest of the California Congress are already continuing to cut education, health-care, and all social services. The cuts that have already passed stay on the books and more cuts will keep coming.

There are others that proclaim that instead of simply more taxes across the board, we should instead tax the richest people within society. It is these people that made up the coalition of Leftists who came to the state capitol in early May. They are calling for higher taxes on the rich and a re-shifting of priorities on what tax-money is spent on.

Large non-profit activist groups such as Code Pink,

socialist political parities like the Peace and Freedom Party, and 'peace' talking-heads like Cindy Sheehan have helped to organize this 'May Strike and March' from the Bay Area to Sacramento which also coincided with a week of demonstrations by unions designed to promote the tax extensions.[iv]

The march started in the Bay Area and snaked its way east towards the valley, stopping in various towns along the way to hold banners and small protests. Upon reaching the capitol, the plan was that the group would convene in front of the capitol and then go in and 'occupy' the building, gaining numbers from the union demonstration. Both camps were united in agreeing that the 'democratic process' was capable of meeting their demands and that if they could just get the politicians to listen or pressure them enough, things would change.

On May 9th, these demands fell on deaf ears. After the marchers arrived and listened to a parade of union official's speeches, about 70 people were arrested inside the Sacramento capitol rotunda after refusing to leave. When the police made the announcement that arrests were imminent, many people got up and headed for the door as the arrests were purely symbolic. The capitol had already been closed and 'politics-as-usual' had gone home to their mansions.[v] In the coming days, the California Teacher's Association (CTA) also conducted several staged media stunts that resulted in 26[vi] arrests.[vii] The next week, Brown released his proposed budget plan which included continued attacks on education, social-services, and medical care. At this point, it remains unclear if Republicans will be able to block the tax-increases on the ballot during the summer.

Protester voluntarily arrested inside the capitol building in Sacramento

The Leftists involved with organizing the May Strike and March proposed to "occupy" and camp out at the capitol until "their" legislature agreed "to fund education, schools, and teachers." In doing so, they reasoned that they would "bring Wisconsin to Sacramento." Looking back at our recent interview with someone involved in the Wisconsin occupation on this blog, we can see that this is clearly not what happened. Workers and students in Wisconsin began actions in response to Walker's proposed bill attacking public employees by launching wild-cat strikes, walkouts of schools, and calling into work sick en masse. All of these actions were discouraged by labor-union officials. Soon, people were occupying the state capitol of Wisconsin in an attempt to block the passing of the bill. As our interviewee noted, this wasn't an exercise in democracy, but instead one of working class power. As prole.info wrote:

"This is not the ultimate form of democracy. We are imposing our needs on society without debate—needs that are directly contrary to the interests and wishes of rich people everywhere. There is no way for us to speak on equal terms with this society."

Despite the actions in Wisconsin, Walker passed the bill, leading to the second occupation of the capitol building as some workers began to talk about the need for a general strike: a massive strike of all workers, regardless of industry or profession. The union leaders responded instead by calling for everyone to end the occupation and return to work. They stated that people should push for a recall of Walker; *"let the lawyers and professional activists handle it,"* they cried; let us lead you, they begged.

But it was the ordinary people of Wisconsin who had started things, not the union apparatus. And thus, any talk by Leftists of 'bringing Wisconsin to Sacramento' is false. They were not interested in self-organized and autonomous working class action — they were interested in democratic lobbying and begging those in power to change.

We locate ourselves within the revolutionary camp. We do not think tax-extensions are the answer; they are based on the same idea that we should pay for the crisis. Taxes themselves are just ways in which those above us suck like parasites from our wages; taking our money and hiring more cops, launching more wars, and keeping their system running. Fighting for something like tax-extensions distracts us from the real battle of attacking the capitalist system. We do not think that slightly-more taxes for the rich, or less money spent on things like the military or wars, will create the kind of revolutionary change that we want or need. None of these things change the implicit nature of a system that makes a few people rich by giving them control

of property while the rest of us remain wage-slaves. Further, this ruling class will not give up their power without a struggle.

We need to recognize the protests in Sacramento and others like it as purely symbolic; as not having the ability to give us any sort of power. Along with the failed "occupation" at the capitol, there have also been sit-ins at banks, protests against bailouts, and disruptions at shareholders meetings all organized by similar large non-profit and union groups. While we certainly are happy that working-class people are taking action, we feel that this mode of activism, or the focusing on issues and trying to get those in power to respond to our concerns is useless. If we understand ourselves to be a we with shared conditions, then we can begin to act on our needs regardless of the laws or edicts of other classes.

But how can we act and organize to build power rather than giving it away? How can we resist so that it represents the world we want to live in and meet our needs now instead of placing faith in politicians? Capitalism effectively blocks access to things that all of us need centralizing resources in the hands of a ruling class and enforced by violence. The current austerity measures in both the California and Federal budgets attack the safety nets that mitigate this reality, further reducing our access to food, clothes, shelter, health-care, and security.

First, we can begin to think about ways in which we can act that reverse this process of degrading access, and instead open up access to the resources we all need and return them to the neighborhoods and communities that use them. Or, we can shutdown and occupy the infrastructure of our enemies and make it work for us. Have they shut down a day-care center at your Junior College? Occupy it or another vacant building and have free day-care for all. Is a vacant lot sitting unused? Take it over and plant gardens. Takeover vacant houses and turn them into meeting centers or housing for those who have been foreclosed on or evicted. The process of taking things out of the hands of those in power and liberating them back into the hands of the people for our own purposes has been called "communization."

Second, we must normalize collective confrontation with the state and its police when we are attacked. With the crisis comes increased repression. In countries like France, police murders are often met with night after night of rioting, looting businesses, and clashes with police. We need to begin these practice as well. We can normalize other actions, too. When prices are raised on public transportation, we can collectively refuse to pay. We can also begin to loot en-masse, take over property, and begin the practice of meeting together to discuss our actions and how to proceed. We can promote walkouts, general strikes, sabotage, and occupations – actions which refuse to give anything to those in power. All of this comes along with a rejection of a belief in 'democracy,' or the working class giving the ruling class power by 'representing' us, and instead puts faith in our own abilities and actions.

Third, we must generalize struggles and break down the barriers that divide us. As this piece is written, several large labor struggles are boiling in Southern California. Grocery workers at several major chains are on strike and nurses have also walked off the job. We need to expand these strikes from beyond these industries and push them into general strikes. If one neighborhood, community, or workplace takes up a struggle, we should show solidarity with it as much as possible. And by solidarity, we do not mean hitting the "like" button on Facebook, we mean showing physical solidarity in ways that help that struggle. The recent indigenous occupation of Glen Cove in Vallejo, California has brought hundreds, if not thousands of people out to the occupation for over a month. There, indigenous warriors have occupied the land to stop commercial development of a sacred site. In times like these, spaces like Glen Cove can act as a commune and a base of power in which rebels can come together to meet each other and discuss strategy; forming bonds and making plans.

The crisis will get worse next year – much worse. We will see continued battles in public education as well as more and more labor struggles. Everywhere we must seek to make the connections within the working class; immigrants, students, workers, the unemployed. We must resist those that simply want a new version of this system and push forward towards the world that we truly want to see.

Insurrection VS Democracy

Everywhere we are told that 'democracy' means that the people decide; that the people have the power and that the people determine how society will be organized. Year in and year out, democracy does quite the opposite. Democracy simply keeps things the same. Democracy, we are told, is the way in which we determine how our lives are organized, yet it is generally something that we only participate in every two or four years (if we choose to at all), and even then, it is to pick someone else who will make decisions for us. When we act in a democratic fashion, it is not to take control of our lives, but instead, to give our power away to someone else. The democratic process does not give us power or make us more free; on the contrary, it strips us of our agency and the ability to make decisions on our own; it gives us the illusion that we control and decide our fates while actually handing it over to someone else. Furthermore, this process has the audacity to pretend that if things are bad it 'must be our fault,' because after all, we voted for this.

Democracy is often sold to us as a way in which large groups of people make decisions together. We are told it happens every time we come together and decide as a group how to organize society. However, our reality is much different. Everything about our lives is beyond our control. We have no say in how our time, labor, and energy are spent or used. We go to work because we must rent ourselves to the rich in order to survive. We must work in order to get wages in which we buy back the products of our labor. We are forced to pay for rent just for a place to sleep. Our streets are patrolled by murderous police, the borders by armed guards, the nations of the world by powerful armies, and prison awaits us if we get out of line. The economy and the states which exist to support it aren't 'under our control;' they control us. It isn't large bodies of people like us that make the decisions which shape our lives, but small groups of rich and powerful elites. Even when we are allowed to pick from a select group of them, 'our leaders' always protect their interests, not ours. It doesn't matter if they are a woman, if they are black, or if they are in a wheelchair. The myth of democracy is a powerful one; it allows us to believe we are free when everywhere we are not.

Democracy isn't a social activity. We don't decide at work how the workplace will be organized – or if we even want to work at all. We don't get to organize our day to day lives, whether it's traffic, the cops, or even how our cities are laid out and designed. When we are asked to 'participate' in democracy, it's always in a small voting booth, picking some rich person that we are told will "represent" us. Is it any wonder why so many people don't vote? What passes for 'spirited' and 'informed' debate on the 'issues' in this country is also nothing more than propaganda from the ruling forces shoved down our throats again and again. Furthermore, while this society gives us 27 news channels with almost the exact same views from Free Speech TV to Fox News, none of them question the existence of capitalism and its governments at all. We are encouraged to have an opinion on 'the issues,' just as long as we don't take a position against the system itself.

Beyond being a dictatorship of those that control this world over the majority of the population, democracy also produces a narrative of how this reality can be changed. It is the lie of the democratic process itself. In a system such as ours, we are told, democracy gives us the tools to make changes to this society and hold those in power 'accountable.' After all, so the story goes, if we don't like our leaders, we can always vote them out. Have a problem with the po-

lice murdering your daughter? Go to a city council meeting. Have an issue at your work? Write to your Congressman. Want to make things better? Run for office.

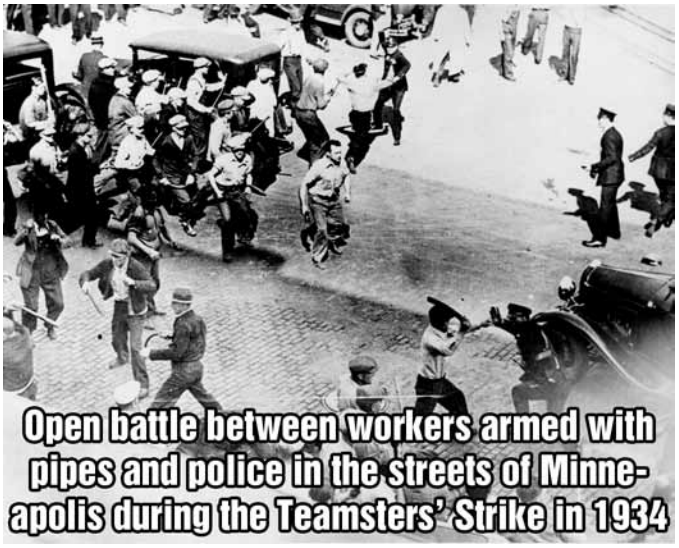
The democratic process is touted as the best way to change society when in reality it is the best way to keep things essentially the same. No matter who we vote for, the things that we all need to survive are kept in the hands of a small group of private and political interests, while the rest of us remain wage slaves. The politicians that represent the interests of the upper class remain in the political driving seat, directing the police and the military while silencing dissent.

When the police murder someone, there are calls for investigations from the FBI and the formation of review boards. When school fees are raised and classes are cut, there are calls to make the Board of Trustees "understand" what they are doing to us. When workers are laid off so a corporation can save money and move the factory, there are calls to 'elect leaders who will listen.' And so on…

However, the democratic process fails us every time. Investigations into the police turn up nothing or exonerate the cold-blooded murderers. When they do even go to trial, they receive less time than most of us get for having weed. Police citizen review boards remain powerless and become a facade for the cops to hide behind. Bureaucrats and politicians use open meetings of the public to explain to them why they must slash services and cut programs that poor and working people need while at the same time giving themselves raises. They allow people to voice their outrage as a way of channeling anger away from the street and back into the safety of the democratic process. The city council sits through hours of senior citizens who are near death talking about the need for medical marijuana, only to end the meeting with a vote to shut down a dispensary. C.E.O.s at shareholder meetings hear delegations of workers

trying to feed their kids only to slash wages and shut down workplaces. Candidates running for office promise to make healthcare free or stop foreclosures, only to bailout banks and gut welfare programs. The democratic process is not designed to make our struggles successful, nor is it a process in which our interests are validated. Instead, it is a way for our anger and dissent to stay neatly packaged within the confines of the government, tightly controlled by the police, and managed by laws and regulations. When we start to break with this process, a whole new world of possibilities breaks out. This is the process of insurrection.

Around the world, we can see many examples of this: in Greece, Egypt, London, and even as close as Oakland, people rise up against the police after they murder people. They do not wait for the police to release information that they know will be filled with lies, they respond on the ground where they live. They attack the police, their cars and buildings, and drive them out of their neighborhoods. They also recognize the role that police have in this world (to enforce poverty on the poor), and defy them by looting from stores, even distributing goods freely amongst themselves. Many times, such as in Spain, Greece, and Egypt, these insurrections have lead to the occupations of public squares. These are places where people can come together and make decisions about the path of the revolt and how it should proceed. Sometimes people agree, sometimes they don't. What is important is that people are able to come together and get organized and make decisions, not create a power structure to carry out the supposed will of the mass. These occupations also stop the city from functioning as before, returning power back to the people holding the space. In Wisconsin, public sector workers furious over attacks on wages and union rights occupied the state capitol. They weren't trying to make 'democracy work,' they were trying to stop democracy from working. They were trying to shut down the state from operating as such and in doing so they placed power back in their own hands.



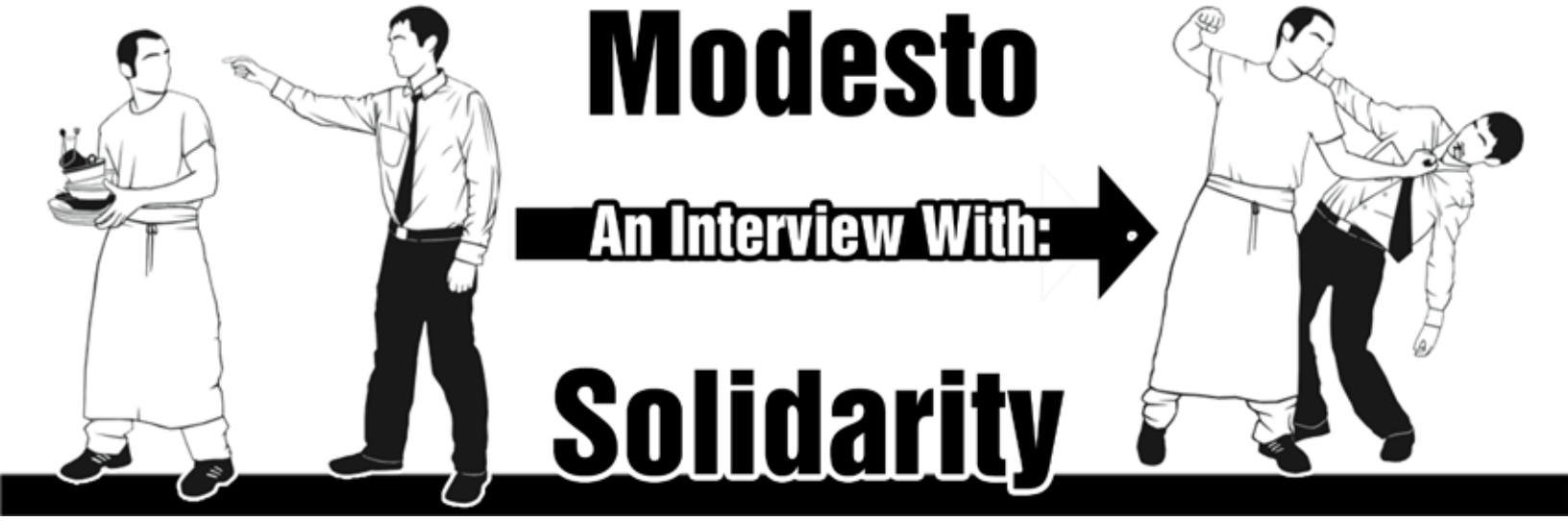
Open battle between workers armed with pipes and police in the streets of Minneapolis during the Teamsters' Strike in 1934

Across the US we see this kind of insurrectionary activity on smaller scales, yet growing all the time. Teachers angry at class size increases and threats of layoffs pack board meetings so tight that the Fire Marshall is called in to shut the meeting down – thus stalling "our leaders" from making decisions. Students at public high schools and at local colleges organize walkouts, shutting the school down through their refusal. When faced with eviction and foreclosure, people occupy their homes, holding off the banks and the cops. On the job, workers walkout on wildcat strikes, refusing to return to work until their demands are met. When faced with police violence, people do not wait to file complaints or write their congressman, they fight back. Across the world, this activity has a similar nature: instead of asking those in power for a redress of grievances, people attack and fight them head on. They do not seek to work within the power structure; they stop it from functioning altogether. This kind of activity does not attempt to create dialog with the rich and powerful as part of a 'democratic process,' instead it negates their wishes completely.

Every time we realize that the democratic modes of expressing our dissent do nothing to change this world, everytime we act outside of these guidelines, we are labeled criminals and often terrorists. We are labeled "outside agitators" by the established and tolerated mainstream unions, non-profit groups, and Leftist groups and political parties. These people want to contain and control people organizing amongst themselves – not deepen, generalize, or spread that organization.

As the economic and ecological crisis deepens, those seeking change will be faced with a choice between insurrection and democracy. When open revolt does break out, when people do attempt to stop the power structure from operating, when we do fight the police forces that attack us, and disrupt the economy of exploitation, there will be those that will cry that we need a return to democracy; that the channels are open for us to work within the system; that we just have to make them listen. The time for dialogue, the time for begging is over. We won't be putting our futures up for a vote or asking the opinion of those who are destroying our lives and our world anymore.

Rioter prepares to lob a molotov cocktail at a police crowd-control vehicle in Santiago de Chile



About three years ago, we caught wind of a group organizing in Seattle, Washington called the Seattle Solidarity Network (SeaSol). This group was exciting to many of us because it successfully puts into practice may of the ideas we talk about here in the magazine, such as solidarity, mutual aid, and intervention in local conflicts between the rich and the working class. We are very excited to see the rise of a similar group here in Modesto. Their first fight was in late June and resulted in a win. - Modesto Anarcho

MA: What is a solidarity network?

A solidarity network is pretty simple in concept: an informal "union" of working people, who seek to support each other through direct action and mutual aid. This support can take many forms, but usually what it looks like is a bunch of friends working together to counter abuses by bosses and landlords — such as unpaid wages, withheld deposits, or in the case of our first fight, illegal lockouts.

MA: Why did you decide to start a solidarity network?

Some of us had been tossing the idea around for awhile, inspired by the Seattle Solidarity Network. They've been running similar campaigns for several years now. But it wasn't until some people from Seattle visited Modesto as part of their West Coast Tour a couple months back that we really got organized.

MA: How does the solidarity network work?

Modesto Solidarity is an all-volunteer network; no one gets paid for their work. We have no sources of funding, just dedicated individuals. We have no central leadership; we make decisions as a group. We have no political platform or official "party line." Rather, the act of standing together to defend ourselves against employers and landlords is what brings us together. We refer to our campaigns as "fights." Let's walk through an example:

First, somebody will come to the network with a problem. Typically, this problem is something that either can't be solved with a lawyer, or is too time-sensitive to permit a traditional solution with an attorney. We mentioned some examples before, but others could be someone who was fired without just cause, missing wages, being harassed by a foreman or supervisor, being forced to work overtime without extra pay, or even just an unsafe or unhealthy work environment. These are all examples where response time can be crucial.

We meet with the person to determine whether or not we can help them. The biggest things we consider are whether or not we can win the fight, and whether or not the people affected are both willing and able to participate not only in their own fight, but especially in supporting other workers and tenants in their own fights. If all goes well, the person/s "joins" the network, and we go from there.

A fight begins with a demand delivery. A group of us will accompany the affected person/s to deliver a letter to their landlord or boss (otherwise, the target of the fight). A typical letter will say: "this is what you have done; this is why what you have done is wrong; this is what you must do to remedy the problem; and this is how much time you have to meet our demands." Once they have handed over the letter, we leave as a group. If our demands have not been met by our deadline, the fight really begins, and doesn't stop until those affected are satisfied.

MA: Is the solidarity network a form of charity or social service?

In short: no. The first goal of the solidarity network is to support one another with mutual aid. We do this not as an act of charity, but in solidarity with one another; out of a shared need for the ability to fight back against the rich and get what's our's. We do not operate as a charity, where one group is providing a service to others. If someone joins the group they are expected to participate, and if someone is in need of our efforts, they are expected to join the group.

MA: Can you tell us about your first fight or campaign?

Sure. Michele is a renter who lives in Modesto. She was illegally locked out of her apartment. We first heard from Michele in late June when she saw one of our fliers and called our hotline, about a week after being locked out. Immediately, several of us met with her, talked over the problem, and then did further discussed it with the rest of the group. Two days later, we delivered a demand letter to her landlord, John Hertle of EXIT Realty. We demanded that he provide a set of keys and safe access to her apartment within 24 hours. In several email responses, John attacked Michele's character, while ignoring our demands. So, with fair warning, our campaign began. 24 hours after delivering the letter, we returned to EXIT realty, picket signs in hand. After a brief picket, Michele and supporters met with John Hertle, and within hours she was back in her home.

MA: What do you hope to do in the future with this network?

Grow. Take on more fights and expand. The strength of networks like this, and the strength of poor and working people everywhere, lies in numbers, in masses. There is an old saying embraced by the wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW), that says *"an injury to one is an injury to all,";* we take this to heart. A huge part of what made Michele's fight so quick was that we had 20 people accompany her for the demand delivery. Needless to say, this makes a huge impression on bosses and landlords. Numbers are also important for longer campaigns. The Seattle network has taken on fights lasting months, picketing several days every week. To accomplish this successfully, they need numbers. One great thing about how the network works is that instead of attempting to offer a service, we simply support others in the group, and if you want help from the network you are expected to join it and help others

by participating in fights other than your own. It is common for friends and family members to want to be involved if a loved one is. This creates a model which, in theory, expands with every fight.

MA: How can people get involved?

Give us a call, check out our website, or shoot us an email. We are constantly on the lookout for new people to get involved, because the more people who are involved the more power we have as a network. While we don't hold scheduled meetings, we are constantly in contact. If you or someone you know has a problem with their boss or landlord, hit us up and, if we think we can help, we'll meet with you asap.

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"An injury to one is an injury to all,"

Modesto Needle Exchange Case Closes

An interview with one of the Mono Park Two

In April of 2011, the 'Mono Park 2' had all charges against them, for their participation in the Modesto Needle Exchange, dropped. Robert Stanford, the man who set this legal battle in motion, which cost tax-payers in Stanislaus County thousands of dollars, never got his wish to see the Mono Park 2 "go to jail." With the DA dropping charges, this brought an end to a two-year battle in which supporters demonstrated outside the courthouse, packed the courtrooms, distributed educational information, organized benefits, and also conducted needle clean-ups in local parks and neighborhoods.

The picture above is of a portion of 63 needles collected by volunteers associated with Modesto Needle Exchange on one of these clean-up days in Mono Park, where the exchange took place.

In the spring of 2009, the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department launched a sting operation against the Modesto Needle Exchange Program. The SCSD had been tipped off by Robert Stanford, a self-described "civil-rights" activist. In a letter to the District Attorney, Stanford stated that the needle exchange program was doing everything from simply giving needles away to giving them to young children. He also claimed that it was organized by the "terrorist group," Modesto Anarcho. While Stanford had been a vocal opponent of head Sheriff Adam Christianson before the sting, they both appeared together before the Board of Supervisors claiming that they would end the needle exchange at Mono Park in order to clean out the "junkies and anarchists." In the police report after the shut-down of the operation, Sheriffs made note that copies of Modesto Anarcho were being distributed and that one of the volunteers was wearing a t-shirt with an anarchist symbol.

For a politician-in-waiting like Stanford, the case offered a chance to tout something that he had done while he ran (and lost) his race for a council seat: gotten the needle-exchange shut down. For the police, the case presented a chance to legally go after anarchists and revolutionaries in the city that they saw as a threat.

However, while the politicians and police hoped that those arrested would plead out quickly, and stop their community work, the response of the Mono Park 2 was instead to increase their organizing activities. In the end, it was the their determination to fight the charges which forced the DA to drop them. The interview which follows was conducted to allow those operating the needle exchange to explain the true nature of their efforts to rid the street of dirty needles and control the spread of Hep C and HIV in our neighborhoods.

The Mono Park 2 are working class heroes. They are regular people who saw government inaction and indifference in the wake of a massive problem, and they took direct action. In doing so they faced repression, but they also discovered solidarity in hundreds of supporters. This case demonstrates the lengths to which the government and the police will go to stop grassroots efforts to fight drug addiction and disease in working-class and poor communities in the Central Valley. Let us remember that they stood up, and let us also remember who tried to make them fall.

MA: What is a needle exchange?

A needle exchange or NEP/SEP (Needle/Syringe Exchange Program) is a place where intravenous (IV) drug users and diabetics can get free access to clean syringes in

exchange for used or "dirty," ones. Besides syringes, other clean materials are commonly distributed, including sterile water containers, bottles of bleach, cookers, matches or lighters, tourniquets, cotton pellets or balls, condoms, and even sterile meth or crack pipes with brillo pads for filters. In addition to these materials, information on safe injection, hepatitis, HIV, and other safety pamphlets are often supplied at needle exchanges. Sometimes wound care, hepatitis testing, and sex worker outreach is also available. These exchanges take place anywhere from established clinics, to street-based or mobile delivery services. Some are legal and some aren't. Each individual exchange does similar things, but each one is different in its creativity.

So the question would be: why do we supply all these materials? The answer is simple: People are going to use narcotics regardless of what we say. Poor folks with diabetes often can't afford clean syringes and other materials. The concept here is to reduce the harm which would otherwise be inflicted on the individual who is forced to share dirty needles with others. The hepatitis C virus can live outside the body for up to 4 days. However, many experts think it usually survives up to 16 hours at room temperature. It's transmitted by blood-to-blood contact and seldom through sex without condom. This explains how the disease can spread through dirty tourniquets or cotton balls, in or on a syringe, cooker, broken crack or meth pipe, or even someone's shirt. We provide sterile water because injecting tap water could lead to contamination. The bleach bottle is an old school method of reducing harm by drawing up bleach through used syringes before sharing. This has been NOT been proven to be 100% effective in reducing the spread of disease, but some exchanges still give them out: no harm in having access to all safe precautions. However, a clean needle definitely IS proven to be 100% effective.

Mono Park, where the needle exchange took place in Modesto's Airport neighborhood

MA: What is harm reduction?

One could say that Harm Reduction is an old idea but a new movement. Indigenous tribes all over the world have been experimenting with mind-altering plant-based substances like marijuana, iboga (Ibogaine), mushrooms, and peyote since the beginning of time. Some indigenous peoples still practice with psychotropics to reduce their dependency on other drugs like methamphetamines or alcohol. Harm Reduction is a philosophy; a way to live one's life; an effective alternative tool to the current disease model. Harm Reduction is strapping on a seat belt, not because it's a law, but because it could help save one's ass from a possible accident. It means dealing with where one is at in the moment, rather than telling people where they need to be or should be. I embrace Harm Reduction and Autonomy.

MA: Why did people in Modesto decide to start a needle exchange program?

I got word that an above-ground attempt to get an exchange running was in the works. Before it could start, the program was voted down by the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors, 4-0. Overall I found the project be a poor effort that had been put together by citizens, the public health department, and bureaucrats. I started to get some training and attended workshops about how to start a Needle Exchange Program (NEP). I started exchanging with two associates who I knew that were intravenous drug users. I didn't have a cell phone at the time and found it hard to navigate the exchange that way, so I decided to pick a location and started talking with people on the street. They directed me to Mono Park in the Airport District of Modesto. I checked it out and the day I went, I witnessed a person drawing up water out of a puddle into their syringe to get their fix. This screamed PROBLEM! Supporters from all over donated materials for us to start the exchange. I made a sign and soon after the exchange started as a street-based service at Mono Park.

In the United States, NEPs began with self-organized efforts which existed outside of the law. They date back to the times of early Food Not Bombs arrests (late '80's-early 90's). There have been plenty of arrests and court battles before mine; cases like this are nothing new, just new to

An early Modesto Needle Exchange table in Mono Park

Modesto. In the Central Valley, Sacramento went through several NEP cases. It has now been legalized in the city, but not in some parts of Sacramento County. The Fresno NEP started in 1994. There were 2 arrests in 18 years of dedicated needle exchanging. Both times the cases were dropped. The driving force behind changing public health policies is that pressure which is exerted by people putting themselves on the line. Similar to opinions that the Oscar Grant riots in Oakland pushed those bureaucrats to hold Johannes Mehserle accountable for his murderous actions in killing Oscar; it may not have been the result that people were looking for, but you catch my drift. In other words, the Oakland rebellions forced the power structure to recognize the power the people hold.

MA: What were some of the conditions in Modesto that the needle exchange sought to change or combat?

The spread of Hepatitis C and HIV; the spread of any diseases for that matter. Modesto is a hot spot on the map in our nation. It's estimated somewhere roughly between 60-90% of IV users in Stanislaus County are infected with Hep C. That's above 50%. Again, this screams problem! I can't count how many users that came to the exchange telling me they were Hep C-positive. One person was HIV- and Hep C- positive. Needle Exchanges have been proven to reduce the spread of disease: It's a fact! The research and evidence is there. In addition, I wanted to build relationships based on trust and compassion; to let users know that they aren't being ignored. I didn't want to rely on a health system that treats us like we're dumb and not capable of taking care of each other unless there's a law that says we should. I also wanted to say enough is enough; we don't need permission to help others. The fact that our city neglects this issue breeds violence in itself. They say we're encouraging their drug use. We say no, we we're not. How the hell does a clean syringe encourage drug use? Syringes don't get you high! It's like the argument about gun violence; do guns kill, or do people kill with guns?

MA: What was the response from the surrounding community towards the needle exchange?

That was actually a complicated part in starting this exchange: here I am coming onto their turf with clean needles. I imagined that if I were in their shoes, this might look a little odd, or make them think that it was a trap. Little did I know that I would be accepted right away! They gave me props; they told me that it was about time. They said that they were glad to see me, because a day earlier they just happened to have looked out of their window and saw two men sharing a rig [needle] out in broad daylight in Mono Park. At the same time, you had cops driving by slowly in order to see what was going on. Over all though, I witnessed more positive feedback than negative.

MA: What happened when the needle exchange was stopped by the Sheriff's Department?

The day that Modesto Needle Exchange was shut down, two undercover cops received clean syringes from us and about 15-20 minutes later unmarked sheriff cars rolled up on us. They set up a sting operation to have us shut down. We went through the general procedure one goes through: they took pictures of us as well as all the materials on the picnic table, and confiscated 178 clean syringes, leaving us with hundreds of dirty ones. The police report later verified that the entire sting was recorded on video, and that the undercover sheriffs were "tapped" with an audio wire. Also, two "clients" of the exchange were stopped, detained, searched, and one was picked up on parole violation; we are assuming it was for possession of drug paraphernalia. Supposedly, an officer was propositioned for a narcotic at some point before the shut down. Evidently, nothing came

An informational table at Mono Park during a later Needle Exchange

Supporters rally outside the Stanislaus County Courthouse during pretrial

out of that. They were obviously there to shut down the exchange and not get the "drug dealer."

MA: Can you explain the involvement of Robert Stanford, the snitch, in all of this?

He's not someone to trust, that's for sure. For those reading this, Robert Stanford works or has worked with anyone from law enforcement to the local chapter of our ACLU. He's plugged into every pseudo-liberal agenda that's going on in the community; he can't keep his nose out of anything. His slander and abuse has included him mostly blogging about us online. Anything from calling us a bunch of delinquent young skater punks, to claiming that no dirty needles were coming in to the exchange, to saying that we were giving out syringes to kids or under-agers. Let's make this clear again: A clean syringe doesn't get one high, it's what could possibly go in the syringe. The "sweep it under the rug" mentality will not stop the sharing of syringes. They will do it regardless. One has to come to where the person is at in their lives, rather then telling them what they should be doing. I can't stop a user from using. I wasn't there to counsel, I.D. people, or get into other personal details. The mission of the Modesto Needle Exchange was simply to provide clean syringes so that they wouldn't share. Another complaint by "Blogger Bob" was that giving out 20 syringes for every 2 weeks is too much; the Fresno NEP gives out 21 a week, because the estimated use by a user is 3 needles a day.

MA: What have some of the consequences of the sting operation been for the needle exchange volunteers?

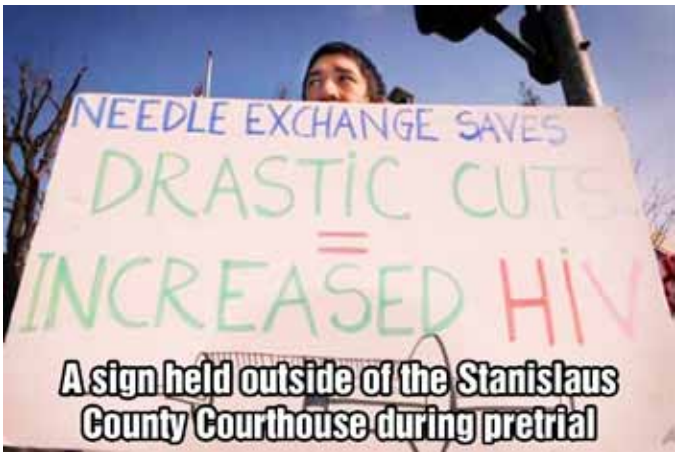
I can't speak on behalf of my partner in the case, because there are still some loopholes which they have to go through in order to get their life back together. Let's just say that they were screwed over economically in every way imaginable. It's been fucked up both mentally and emotionally for both of us. I had to leave my job as a care-provider for a client I had with cerebral palsy for more than 6 years, because the stress became unbearable. I knew some form of punishment was hanging over my head, and it wasn't fair to me or him to continue working.

MA: The Stanislaus County Sheriffs Department has made a big deal about this being an 'anarchist project.' Why do you think this is?

The intention wasn't at all to be an "anarchist," or a "non-anarchist project." Sure, it had radical sway and tendencies. Things are usually defined as radical when one steps outside the box to take concern regardless of laws or reason for laws. The prevalence of dirty needles was a community concern which local public health officials blatantly neglected. It's just easy to target it as an anarchist project, especially when there is an anarchist presence in a small city like Modesto. I don't need to tell any anarchist out there that historically they get this kind of treatment. At the same time though, what does one expect when the mainstream slant on anarchism or anarchy means 'blowing shit up.' Stanislaus County communities don't really know what anarchism is or they get misguided ideas of what it means by big media outlets, the government, etc…

MA: Some people have stated that the exchange was 'giving needle to children,' and 'simply giving needles away.' How would you respond to this?

It's bullshit. Robert (the snitch) Stanford stated things like this on his blog. My answer to that is simple: My duty and dedication didn't include identifying people; we weren't encouraging kids to come to the exchange, nor did we encounter anyone who came out to the exchange that appeared to be under 18. We had a log sheet that asked everyone anonymously what age they were, how many



A sign held outside of the Stanislaus County Courthouse during pretrial

A banner demanding charges be dropped against the needle exchange defendants

needles were going out, how many needles were coming in, if they were homeless or not, their race, and sex. We weren't there to make "clients" more nervous than they already were for being at the exchange. For example: I had a woman at the exchange approach me crying. She told me that she was both Hepatitis C and HIV positive, and that she had just found that she was infected recently. All I could do was listen to her and show compassion; I was not someone that could help with her emotional issues and trauma from being infected.

MA: How have people supported you leading up to the trial?

We never went to trial. After nearly 2 years in court, and the judge denying our medical necessity defense, the District Attorney finally gave us a deal that wouldn't involve any conviction on our records about a week before trial was scheduled to start. We took a 6-hour drug diversion class that would open the doors for others. According to the latest in propositions this type of statewide diversion would help folks with similar charges avoid jail time. The class was amusing though; there was even a prostitute and a guy busted for trying to pick up a prostitute. What does that have to do with drug diversion? Although we had to plead guilty to something which we did not do, namely the distribution of drugs or drug paraphernalia, we found this the best way out.

We know that it doesn't take a genius to self-organize. The bureaucrats have turned this case into a political issue, however we were just doing conscious Public Health work. It doesn't take a "professional" to know how to educated people about the danger of sharing needles, and how to prevent the spread of diseases. A statewide effort to legalize needle exchanges in emergency impacted areas including Stanislaus County is quickly approaching. We all might just get what were hoping for by the end of the year.

MA: Anything you would like to say in closing? How can people contact you?

Get Harm Reduction and NEP training. Start a NEP in your area. Just be cautious of your surroundings if you're doing it underground. Get hip to your county laws. Go mobile. Use your cell phone for exchanges. Do the above-ground work, but don't ignore the power in self-organizing your own exchange individually or collectively. To get in touch, hit me up at stancountyrmh@gmail.com, or check out my blog at stancountyrmh.blogspot.com .

I want to first and foremost thank my partner in this case for being down enough and being the Braveheart that they are to get involved. It was a crazy and bitter process but we both learned a lot from it. I wanna thank all of our supporters, local and abroad. All my friends that stood by us in court. The folks that donated funds. The Longhaul Infoshop in Berkeley, David with Bound Together Bookstore Collective in San Francisco, Mary Howe with SF Needle Exchange, Celeste with Free Mind Media of Santa Rosa, Points of Distribution in Oakland, Rachel, Lynell, and all the folks with S.A.N.E., Modesto Anarcho, Bobby B. with Richmond Exchange, The Revolutionary Hip-Hop Report, Modesto Copwatch, Dallas and Ashley with Fresno Needle Exchange, the Oasis Clinic folks of Oakland, my sister and mentor Rachel Jackson, Patt Denning and Tara Klien at Harm Reduction Therapy Center in Oakland for emotional support, Hilary and staff (past and present) at Harm Reduction Coalition, The Harm Reduction Institute for all the trainings, and anyone else I may have forgotten. It's been a long two years.

The sun over Mono Park one afternoon, in Modesto's Airport neighborhood

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